

NAMIBIA AND GERMANY NEGOTIATING THE PAST

REINHART KÖSSLER



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Namibia and Germany: Negotiating the Past

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‘Even in brutality the inherited dress is sacred.
The love and honour given to it
A safe haven for humanity, not a lion’s den.’

Jacqueline Tjozongoro

Anmut sparet nicht noch Mühe
Leidenschaft nicht noch Verstand,
daß ein gutes Deutschland blühe
wie ein andres gutes Land;

daß die Völker nicht erbleichen
wie vor einer Räuberin,
sondern uns die Hände reichen
so wie andern Völkern hin.

Bertolt Brecht

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Abbreviations

AAB	Anti-Apartheid-Bewegung (West German Anti-Apartheid Movement)
AACRLS	Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle
AGDS	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Schulvereine (Working Group of German School Societies [in Namibia])
ATCA	Alien Tort Claims Act (U.S.A.)
AU	African Union
AZ	<i>Allgemeine Zeitung</i> , Windhoek (German Namibian Newspaper)
CDU/CSU	Christlich-Demokratische Union/Christlich-Soziale Union (Conservative party in Germany)
DED	Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (German development volunteer service)
DELK	Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (German Evangelical Lutheran Church, in Namibia)
DIAP	Deutsche Internationale Abiturprüfung
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
EKD	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (German Protestant Church Federation)
ELCRN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
FAZ	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i>
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Liberal Party in Germany)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
GSWA	German South West Africa
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (now merged with other bodies into Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ)
HDI	Human Development Index
HPRC	Herero People Reparations Corporation
JSAS	Journal of Southern African Studies
MAKSA	Mainzer Arbeitskreis Südliches Afrika (Mainz Working Group on Southern Africa)
MdB	Mitglied des Bundestags (Member of the <i>Bundestag</i>)
<i>NamS</i>	<i>Namibian Sun</i> , Windhoek (Namibian newspaper in English)
NAN	National Archives of Namibia
NBC	Namibian Broadcasting Corporation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
<i>NE</i>	<i>New Era</i> , Windhoek (Namibian newspaper primarily in English)
NGSIP	Namibian German Special Initiative Programme

NGTC	Nama Genocide Technical Committee
NHDR	Namibia Human Development Report
NP	National Party (South Africa)
NPC	National Planning Commission
NPCC-04	National Preparatory Committee for the Commemoration 2004
NTLA	Nama Traditional Leadership Association
NUDO	National Unity Democratic Organisation
OCCTC	Okakarara Community Cultural and Tourism Centre
OCD-1904	Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for the Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide
OGC	Ovaherero Genocide Committee
ODA	Overseas Development Aid
OOGF	Ovaherero Ovambanderu Genocide Foundation
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism)
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
POW	Prisoners of War
<i>Rep</i>	<i>Republikein</i> Windhoek (Namibian newspaper primarily in Afrikaans)
RMG	Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (Rhenish Missionary Society)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands; Social Democratic Party of Germany
SS	Schutzstaffel (Nazi terror organisation and special army)
SWANU	South West African National Union
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation; since 1990, SWAPO Party of Namibia
SZ	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> , Munich
<i>taz</i>	<i>die tageszeitung</i> , Berlin
TN	<i>The Namibian</i> , Windhoek (Namibian newspaper primarily in English)
TSÜ	Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen/Freunde der früheren deutschen Schutzgebiete (Association for the Tradition of Former Protection and Overseas Troops – Friends of the Former German Protectorates)
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNITA	União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group
U.S.A.	United States of America
VEM/RMG	Vereinigte Evangelische Mission/Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (United in Mission/Rhenish Missionary Society), refers here to the archives holdings.
WO	<i>Windhoek Observer</i> , Windhoek (Namibian newspaper primarily in English)
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union (today: ZANU-PF)

Preface and Acknowledgements

TO THE VISITOR WHO ARRIVES WITH AN INTEREST IN PEOPLE, RATHER THAN IN VACATIONING, landscapes and animals, Namibia is a fascinating country. While investigating practices and backgrounds of Nama traditional communities in southern Namibia during the 1990s, I inevitably became aware of annual commemorations observed by people there, as well as the similar practices of Ovaherero communities in the centre of the country. Within the context of my earlier 1990s research project, I made my first forays towards a better understanding of Heroes Day (*Witbooi fees*) in Gibeon, which I observed in 1995. I had the privilege of extended discussions on the subject with the late *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi, who was extremely forthcoming with help in all my relevant endeavours, in which he took a very keen interest.

The idea of a special research project to reach a better and also comparative understanding of these events and commemorative practices was conceived readily. However, putting this project into practice turned out to be far more difficult and long-term. Meanwhile, the arrival of 2004, the centennial year of the onset of genocide in what was then German South West Africa, alerted me that I was into something much more serious and difficult than merely observing, assembling and analysing people's memorial practices. Given the pervasive reference of the commemorations to the genocide perpetrated by the *Schutztruppe* from 1904 onwards, I was compelled to do some hard thinking (and more) on account of the obvious question people eventually did pose in various ways: 'And what are you (personally) doing on your side of this equation?' In this way, I was led to widen my perspective considerably. My project became concerned with the postcolonial and transnational constellation between Namibia and Germany, with the issue of genocide, appropriate apology and reparations at its centre.

During 2004, I became involved in some commemorative activities in the very special ways my life situation circumscribed. These included staging a photo exhibition on the genocide in cooperation with the Director of the Kyoto Museum of World Peace, Ikuro Anzai, whom I had the good fortune to meet during my stay at Ritsumeikan University, Japan, in late 2003 and early 2004. The whole venture would not have been possible without the generous help of my friend Toshiko Himeoka, then at Ritsumeikan College of International

Relations. By staging this exhibition, based on the admirable collection of pictures supplied by Joachim Zeller, it was possible to mark the beginning of the Herero–German War and convey something of this history to an audience otherwise quite unaware of issues pertaining to southern Africa. For me personally, this also became a launching pad for further activities. Later in the year, I was able to stage a German version of this exhibition jointly with my activist friend, Dagmar Wolf, in the socio-cultural centre ‘Bahnhof Langendreer’ in Bochum, where I lived at the time. At the same time, I started to map out the conceptual issues of the project, and I acknowledge in particular valuable advice by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka.

In Namibia, I observed the central commemoration at Ohamakari on August 14, 2004, and met a number of people who were to figure in the project that was still evolving and finally resulted in the present book. I would like to mention especially the late Luther Zaire, Rudolf Hongoze, and Usiel Kandji. Besides this, interest in Germany in the country’s colonial past increased to some degree around 2004 and resulted in requests for conference appearances and publications that prompted me to delve more deeply into the subject.

A decisive turn came when André du Pisani, then at the Department of Public Administration and Political Science at UNAM, suggested I collaborate in a research-cum-capacity building project under the auspices of the ‘Knowledge for Tomorrow’ Funding Initiative of the Volkswagen Foundation. Eventually, this initiative coalesced into the project ‘Reconciliation and social conflict in the aftermath of large-scale violence in Southern Africa: the cases of Angola and Namibia’ which commenced in late 2006, under the auspices of the Arnold Bergstraesser-Institut, Freiburg i.B. and under the leadership of Heribert Weiland. The Volkswagen Foundation not only funded this project and thereby also my personal research but is particularly to be commended for this wonderful capacity building effort which, in various ways, directly bore fruit in this book.

Coordinating the scholarly side of this project proved to be an extremely enriching experience in itself. The project at last afforded me the chance to pursue my long standing research project much more vigorously and consistently than had been possible up to that point, on a more or less private basis. Moreover, cooperation especially with colleagues in the Namibia group of the project – Memory Biwa, Pam Claassen, André du Pisani, Phaniel Kaapama, the late Bill Lindeke, Napandulwe Shiweda and Volker Winterfeldt – meant a genuine boost for my own project. In particular when Memory Biwa joined our overarching ‘Reconciliation and Social Conflict . . .’ project, my own research took a new turn. Her oral history research on the Nama–German War had obvious overlap with my concerns, and she soon also turned to memory practices. Given her much superior advantage in terms of language skills and access to informants, I then focused more on comparative issues and in particular on Namibian–German relations, where over the time period discussed in the third part of this book, transnational memory politics took on particular importance.

The project brought me also to the Arnold Bergstraesser-Institut, which has since become my academic home base. The Freiburg environment turned out to be conducive in other respects. I would like in particular to mention the close cooperation that developed with Heiko Wegmann around his admirable activism focusing on postcolonial concerns, and

later, particularly in connection with his never tiring, determined search for leads in tracking down collections of human remains in Germany. He pursues, with the same determination, the repatriation of cultural goods, all with a local focus on Freiburg. This work coalesced with my own activities when I became part of the German-Swiss Committee of the Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle project. Although we could not achieve all that was and remains necessary in this field, this work generated much insight that has been incorporated into this book, and thanks are due to Helmut Bley, Dag Henrichsen, Gesine Krüger and Hans-Georg Schleicher.

The end result would have been unthinkable without the help and support of Namibian activists and friends. The list cannot be exhaustive, and I shall mention only a few. The steadfastness and acumen of Hon. Ida Hoffmann I have come to admire deeply in the course of numerous talks and consultations, as well as joint endeavours that took us across southern Namibia and also around Germany. Many encounters with Utjua Ester Muinjuangue and Festus Muundjua have been valuable in gaining information and understanding, but also in providing very enjoyable company. Ueriuka Festus Tjikuua helped on various occasions by offering opinions and assessment and filling in gaps. Johanna Kahatjipara shared her knowledge of oral history and Ovaherero custom. Among these, I also found personal friends. Even more longstanding Gibeonite friends include Pauline Dempers and Hans Pieters, and very specially Talita #Ui!nuses and Tamen Uinuseb, who made me 'family' when I was in Namibia.

Over the years I pursued this project, and in collaboration on the overarching Volkswagen project, André du Pisani has become a treasured friend. Countless discussions with him have helped me to grapple with a number of issues addressed in this book. Whenever there was need, Werner Hillebrecht proved not only a long-standing friend, but also, in spite of his heavy duties as Chief Archivist at the National Archives of Namibia, a forthcoming and fruitful support whenever I approached him. Dag Henrichsen helped in many ways through the library of the Basler Afrika Bibliographien, as well as with discussion and reading of draft chapters. Larissa Förster, whose research interests have intersected with mine over the past decade, has been a stimulating partner in discussion and also read draft chapters. On several occasions, Cristiana Fiamingo enriched my stays at TUCSIN Guest House in Windhoek, debating memory related issues, including German and Italian deficiencies in coming to terms with each country's colonial past, and joining me on field trips, as did Memory Biwa and Michael Akuupa. Heike Becker was a constant partner in discussion and the exchange of papers – not to forget our productive visit to Heroes' Acre on Heritage Day 2008; she also hosted me in Cape Town and at the University of the Western Cape. Robert Gordon and Rinda Gordon hosted me in Burlington, Vermont and Bloemfontein, South Africa, provided debate and new insights, and feedback on chapters. Justine Hunter has been an important discussion partner for a long time, and she read chapters and contributed from her in-depth and critical understanding of Namibian memory politics. Anti-Apartheid veterans Markus Braun and the late Ilse Braun encouraged me in some joint action and provoked further thought and probing by their insistence on long-term complicity, in particular on the side of

German Protestantism. Henning Melber, my long term friend and frequent co-author, has been involved in a number of ways in the elaboration of the argument and also read draft chapters. Other debts of gratitude are acknowledged at appropriate places in the footnotes.

Long hauls in intellectual endeavour always are in need of and profit from exchanges with outsiders, and this project has been favoured with many opportunities to present and debate results, too many to present in detail here. Over the years since 2001, my research has been refined and enriched by 42 lectures, conferences and workshops in various formats, mainly academic but some with an activist bent. These were held by institutions in Germany, Namibia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States of America, Japan, Turkey, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway. I am grateful to all the organisers for their interest and for affording me opportunities to discuss ideas and results, as well as arguments in the making in such a large array of settings. The same appreciation extends to the students who attended a number of courses on aspects of the subject matter of this book which I taught at the Institute of Sociology, Münster University, at the Political Science Department of Freiburg University and at the History Department of the University of Zürich.

The refining, complementing, elaborating and revising of a pile of published articles into a hopefully readable book has been helped by a number of people. I would like to mention the initial interest and encouragement of the Publisher of UNAM Press, Jane Katjavivi, who also saw the book through a double blind review process and contributed in the final stages well beyond the normal duties of a publisher. Thanks are also due to two anonymous referees. In the vital copy-editing stage, Tara Elyssa was a strict, but sensitive editor who straightened out not only my linguistic pitfalls, but also the many cases where I had taken things for granted that needed specification and explanation. Her determination and steadfastness under most difficult personal circumstances I appreciate deeply. Jill Kinahan took charge of the project at UNAM Press and contributed decisively to the refinement of the text, as well as attending to a host of issues that are involved in the process of finishing a book. John Kinahan compiled maps 1, 2 and 3 using ArcGIS. Together with her colleague Naitsikile Iizyenda, Jill also helped in assembling the pictures for the book, as did a number of my colleagues mentioned above.

Books generally also involve family. In this case, the involvement is more specific than usual. During work on this project, I received particular encouragement in stimulating discussions as well as feedback on relevant chapters from my brother Gottfried Kössler, who has worked for many years at the Fritz Bauer Institut, the German centre of Holocaust studies in Frankfurt-on-Maine. On a little reflection, we found that this intersection of concerns and the resulting synergies did not come by accident. Our mother Doris Kössler, née Ewald, was, as a secondary school teacher, an early pioneer in teaching history and political studies with intense reference to the Nazi past, at a time when in many quarters this past was still shrouded in silence. In her teaching, as well as in communication with her three sons, she did not leave out her own adolescent entanglement in Nazism. In this way, our late mother has always been a role model of how to confront Germany's dire past in an honest and truthful way. For such reasons, this book owes a lot to her. As always,

my partner Ilse Lenz has, besides enduring my absences while involved in researching in Namibia and in commuting to Freiburg, supported and encouraged me in this project from the beginning and consistently strengthened my resolve whenever necessary. She also has contributed her unmistakably critical gaze on what I have been doing and writing in bringing this book into being.

All these thanks cannot be exhaustive, and they cannot and should not devolve responsibility for any faults and shortcomings that remain – and remain my sole responsibility, as do the translations from languages other than English.

BERLIN & FREIBURG, MARCH 21, 2015



MAP 1 Map of Namibia showing places, regions, historical and geographic features.

Introduction:

A Special Postcolonial and Transnational Relationship

EVER SINCE NAMIBIA ATTAINED INDEPENDENCE IN 1990, HER RELATIONS WITH GERMANY have been marked by intensity, close cooperation and heated debate. The latter revolves largely around the 30 year period from 1884 up to 1915, when today's Namibia was known as the colony of German South West Africa. For the last decade, an asymmetrical debate on colonial mass crime has been a prominent feature of memory politics. In this debate, the first genocide of the 20th Century, committed by German colonial troops during the Namibian War of 1903–08¹, forms the central axis.

The debate about the genocide and the consequences of German colonialism is asymmetrical in various ways. First, it relates to the colonial relationship of violence and domination and to a racist ideology that denied acknowledgement of true humanness to the colonised – an ideological prerequisite for denying them the right to exist and for pursuing exterminatory measures against them. Asymmetry also prevails in the underlying power relations in the present. The means available to the descendants of the genocide victims to give voice to their cause are seriously inferior to the possibilities open to the German Government simply to ignore the victims or deal superficially with their demands. Namibia musters much less attention within the German public sphere than issues relating to Germany receive in the Namibian media. The issue is confounded further by the presence of a small, but economically powerful and vociferous community of German speakers in Namibia.

1 This term refers to the complex process of interrelated wars of anti-colonial resistance during that period, waged notably by Ovaherero and Nama (see Wallace 2011: 155, 353). The time period indicates the beginning of the war, with the killing of Bondelswarts *Kaptein* Abraham Christiaan in Warmbad on October 25, 1903 by the resident German officer, Lieutenant Jobst, and the end of the war with the closing of the concentration camps on May 28, 1908. There is an obvious divergence with the onset of genocidal action on the part of the German *Schutztruppe*, which coincides with the aftermath of the battle at Ohamakari (Waterberg) on August 11, 1904. The adopted terminology notwithstanding, main components of the Namibian War are referred to subsequently also as 'Herero–German war' and 'Nama–German war'. Older literature quoted in the text refers to these wars as 'risings'.

Thus, not only Namibia's past as a German colony is evoked here but also its present status, which remains marked by deep traces of settler colonialism. This particularly intrusive form of colonial rule was effectively imposed during the course and as a consequence of the Namibian War.

Those who argue that after more than a century too much time has passed to seriously address issues connected with the colonial past must be reminded that at the centennial of World War I, one rarely heard claims that relevant debates were dated or anachronistic. Rather, particularly in Germany, debate raged about ostensibly re-opening the case concerning the specific responsibility of Emperor William II's government for this centennial catastrophe. It is not much of a surprise, then, that over a century after the Namibian genocide, and a hundred years after the close of German rule in Namibia in 1915, these historical events remain of great importance to many Namibians. Such relevance stems both from material circumstances and from persistent trauma transmitted through the generations.²

As will be argued at some length in this book, for Germany as well as for German citizens, the current relevance of the consequences of German colonial rule and of the atrocities committed historically in Namibia implies a responsibility which remains insufficiently attended to and as yet unresolved. At the same time, lack of public awareness in Germany, and related insolence and complacency on the part of official German politics, does not change the need for addressing these issues. Much of this book, therefore, will address the debate on ways closure might be achieved and also will explore the reasons why, so far, it remains forestalled.

The debate about the Namibian–German past covers a considerable range of aspects. The most important and pressing of these concerns postcolonial reconciliation. In Namibia in particular, the latter term involves a worn out rhetoric, where quite frequently claims against another group are couched in terms that have become enshrined by the process of transition to independence in 1989–90. In the following chapters, I argue and exemplify that such reconciliation – at least in the particular postcolonial setting – is predicated on reaching a modicum of agreement about a dire past that has to be addressed openly, at least as long as one of the parties concerned sees a need for such open articulation.

This need is even stronger given the prevailing asymmetrical relationship. In the dimension of memory politics, asymmetry exists between those who find themselves in the position of victim and those in the position of perpetrator. Of course neither direct victims nor survivors of the genocide nor active perpetrators are alive today. Still, even more than a century after the event, actors find themselves in the *positions* of victims and perpetrators.

Such positioning means different things on each side. Namibians from the southern and central regions of the country may have transgenerational memories about the suffering meted out to their forebears. They are reminded of the consequences of the genocide in their daily lives, for example, by the prevailing patterns of land distribution and land use. In contradistinction, Germans may relate to these events in much more indirect ways.

2 Generally on trans-generational transmission of trauma and remembrance, see e.g. Volkan 2006: 128–9.

While some personal linkages may exist with family members who emigrated to Namibia at some stage (or returned from there), very few of the roughly 82 million inhabitants of Germany have an ancestor among the 20,000 soldiers who were deployed in the *Schutztruppe* between 1903–08. Indeed, about a fourth of present-day German citizens look back to the immigration of family or of themselves during the time after World War II. However, regardless of such distances, Germans are confronted with an historical responsibility for actions that were planned and sanctioned by the Imperial State of which the Federal Republic today claims rightful succession. These issues will be detailed in various chapters below.

Concerns and claims that are, in part at least, countervailing and contradictory raise the issue of whether and how to reach a common understanding – of negotiating the past in at least two senses of this word:

1. In the sense of charting ways to deal with a past which addresses harsh and painful issues. Unlike negotiating a cliff or a narrow passage, when dealing with a dire past it usually will not do to avoid or steer clear of the difficulties. In particular, the long and intense debate concerning the Holocaust has demonstrated to many – not only in Germany – the importance and even the necessity of ‘working through’ (*aufarbeiten*, Adorno 1963) such a past rather than merely forgetting it, or repressing it from active or articulated memory.
2. In a transnational and postcolonial setting in particular, the image of the past also needs to be negotiated in the sense of reaching at least a modicum of agreement among various concerned groups and institutions, including state governments. This may entail various forms of dialogue. This dialogue hinges on the readiness of all parties concerned to enter into such a process. In the closing chapters of this book, a situation will be addressed where this is not the case, or at least the way towards such dialogue is fraught with considerable difficulty. Such denial may be considered a possible feature of the negotiating process in question and thus may point to the very real difficulties involved.

The common understanding that needs to exist at the start entails a minimal agreement and recognition of what happened and therefore needs to be addressed and ‘worked through’. Thus, even though a full recognition that is satisfactory to all sides may eventually be attained only as an outcome of dialogue, a preliminary form is prerequisite for its beginning. This precondition of preliminary common ground appears to be lacking to a large extent in the case under discussion.

In dealing with these issues, we encounter a situation where matters that are of great, even fundamental and vital importance to one party may be of only marginal interest to the other. In particular, there is stark divergence and tension between vivid and active memory of atrocious deeds on the one hand and virtual amnesia on the other. Differences in perceptions of the past among social groups of whatever kind are nothing exceptional or even remarkable. Memory is precisely a process through which groups constitute their visions of the past (Halbwachs 1925, 1950). Given the limited ability of the human mind to process the plethora of data presented by the outside world (Gehlen 1940: 36–46; Luhmann 1984:

291–2), it is inevitable that events or people will be filtered out and excluded from memory. Further filtering creates a differentiation between functional memory that is momentarily available to actors and storage memory that is retrieved only by special effort and under specific circumstances (A. Assmann 1999: ch. 6). Without going into the complexities of this matter, suffice it to say that memory is not only inherently social, in the sense that it does not exist properly speaking outside the social nexus, but it is also socially malleable. This is of particular importance once group or communicative memory, which hinges on the physical presence of the members and their communication, has expired by the natural passing away of those members, and – once again, only in certain parts – is transferred into a cultural memory that relates to a larger societal nexus (J. Assmann 1992: ch. 2).

Much of the relevant debate revolves around written documents and books as the prime storage media from which people draw to reproduce and reconstruct such cultural memory in the sense of a widely accepted vision of the past. However, as will be shown in some of the following chapters, such a slant all too often results in a bias towards so-called ‘high culture’ and a disregard of other modes of transmitting and reproducing memory (see also Connerton 2002). African historians are well aware that oral tradition can help to reach far beyond the few generations generally assumed to convey oral history, back into times for which no written records exist. Often, such oral traditions are linked to performance, be it in epics or stories, or by ceremonies or rituals.

Another important dimension addressed in this book is the representation of past events, and of claims connected to such events, by the built environment. This includes the lay-out of cities as well as monuments and meaning attached to features in the landscape, which here refers, most importantly, to the Waterberg. In the following discussions, this complex of forms in which memory contents are preserved, reproduced and represented, is referred to as *mnemoscape*.

The issues and conflicts addressed in this book suggest that various modes of reproducing memory are closely related to aspects of social structure. Such social aspects include the extent to which people are able to muster the means to make their voices heard. In this way, the seemingly low technology of oral speech and performance – where nothing is required but human bodies and brains, and the cooperation of humans – may also be associated with the dearth of means at their disposal. This lack of available means relates to the systematic or relative denial of access to other technologies – print or digital media – imposed by colonialism and by the postcolonial situation of gross inequality. In addition, the problem of inequality has a bearing on the routines and competencies in communication that are available to the various actor groups and that become institutionalised amongst them. In this book we will encounter unequal access to means of communication such as newspapers, but also to greatly divergent past and present opportunities for education which then may be employed in a politics of memory. The list will grow longer as we progress.

The brief remarks above should have made clear that what follows is not a book of history in any strict sense. I refer to historical material, and at some points I offer interpretations. The main focus, however, is on political processes at various levels that deal with and draw

on that historical material. For this reason, I am not in the first instance aiming at new insight about what happened, or even about how to understand those events. Rather, my concern is about how groups, individuals and also institutions such as governments and states relate to events that overall are well-known – or indeed, how they refuse to do so.

In the politics of memory that have evolved between Namibia and Germany since Namibia's independence, with ever greater intensity since the centennial year of 2004, a number of trajectories may be detected which criss-cross and intersect. It would be preposterous to pretend to capture all this complexity here. However, some of these lines need to be drawn and followed over the century that has evolved since the genocide. These concern the formation of Namibian nationalism during the period of South African rule (1915–90) and the processes of resurgence and reassembly of those traditional communities that had fallen victim to the genocide. Furthermore, we need to consider the various narratives that pretend to represent Namibia's national past. Despite the country's small population, these narratives show exceptional diversity across regions. After independence in particular, the dominant narrative tended to marginalise the contribution of groups who had undertaken the primary resistance to colonialism in the south and centre of the country.

Moreover, colonial rule, as long as it lasted, barred the way for constructive and active engagement with the past by victim groups who now actively assert their claims. Again, in Germany, memory politics concerning the country's enmeshment in colonialism is still closely linked to wider and more painful developments, particularly of the first half of the 20th Century. These memory practices passed from an active assertion of a supposedly exemplary record by colonial revisionists during the interwar years to the virtual amnesia regarding the German colonial past which could be observed by the 1990s. As will be detailed later, collective excision from memory was considerably modified by the centennial commemorations in 2004. This rise in awareness apparently helped to bring to the fore a current of denial. Such denial is not about consequences of the asymmetries mentioned above, but of active efforts to 'whitewash' colonial war and above all, to contest the classification of what happened as genocide.

In this way, five dimensions or modes of public memory as a postcolonial practice will concern us in this book: assertion, commemoration, denial, amnesia and lastly, recognition. Of these, assertion can be seen as a pro-active approach that advocates public recognition of the memory contents in question, such as gross human rights violations or genocide. It is obviously driven by the victim rather than found from the perpetrator. Commemoration refers to a potentially more inward-looking form of jointly and systematically reproducing memory, in our cases mostly within a communal nexus; however, as will be shown, this mode is of strategic importance in keeping memory contents alive and can serve as a launching pad for assertion.

If assertion and commemoration may be seen as positive modes of treating memory contents, denial and amnesia are obviously negative approaches. In the case of denial, we observe an active, frequently confrontational attitude that contests even the facts connected

with a dire past, or in milder forms, the relevance of such a past to the present. In such cases, a 'final stroke' is advocated that supposedly will foreclose further engagement with the past. All this is not even necessary in the case of amnesia which points to a lack of awareness or outright forgetting. However, it should be noted that this way of dealing with the past is clearly different from forgetting. By implicitly or explicitly banning or downplaying any public engagement with past events, these can be relegated effectively to silence. Yet such silence is not conterminous with complete oblivion. Rather, amnesia relating to past atrocities implies a silent or outspoken decision of not talking about them, of not addressing them. Recognition often results from actively engaging with and confronting the last two modes mentioned. It refers to how groups in the perpetrator position actively engage the past they have inherited, in confrontation with denialists and against the resistance of the dead weight of established amnesia.

As will emerge from the following chapters, these dimensions, while present, are not distributed evenly between Namibia and Germany or indeed within Namibia. However, it is precisely in the ways these dimensions, approaches and attitudes play out between the considerable array of actors (to be found in these transnational fields of memory politics), that important features emerge that characterise the postcolonial relationship between Namibia and Germany.

My main objective in this book is to contribute towards an understanding of the constellation of actors and their backgrounds and motivation within the field of memory politics. This field reflects the entangled history which has evolved between the two countries since the days of German colonial rule. While an array of quite fundamental concepts from a fairly wide range of theoretical debates has been used in the course of my argument, I have not burdened this account by motivating them all. This would have made for elaborate argument about issues such as social memory, ethnicity, the colonial and postcolonial state, entangled modernity, postcolonial and subaltern studies. The book therefore does not contain a chapter setting out a theory which readers then might be asked to skip if found too tedious. Rather, I try to refer with appropriate brevity to the broader conceptual contexts wherever they present themselves in the course of the account.

As we shall see, the postcolonial relationship that exists between Namibia and Germany is specific not least on account of its dimension of memory politics, which has emerged on an increasing scale since 1990 and in particular, since 2004. This is a far cry from saying memory politics is the only dimension of Namibian–German relations. Others include the routinely invoked fact that Namibia is the recipient of the highest per capita quota of German ODA worldwide, even though in absolute numbers, given a rather small Namibian population, this figure would appear more modest. Furthermore, the presence of German speakers in Namibia deserves mention, some coming from families who established themselves as early as the mid-19th Century, while others arrived at various times after World War II. While small German settler communities exist in parts of Latin America or in South Africa as well, Namibia is the only former German colony with such a presence. Along with this, one should take into account a number of personal linkages as well as a

specific role played by German foreign cultural policy in Namibia, with the Goethe Centre in Windhoek as its main instrument.

All of this harks back to the colonial past and the genocide, given that the high ODA is motivated on Germany's part by pointing to an ill-defined 'special responsibility', linked rather vaguely to the colonial past. In addition, linkages between German speakers in Namibia and counterparts in Germany are activated in debates concerning the genocide. Such features may help to explain why the German colonial past is much more of a presence in Namibia than it is in other former German colonies. These issues inevitably relate to memory politics and accordingly will be treated here. It is not my intention or claim here to make an exhaustive study of Namibian–German relations. In the same way, the chapters on the specifically German forms of communicating the genocide or repressing it from public awareness will inevitably touch on significant issues of the German history of violence, particularly in the first half of the 20th Century. Today, part of this history, namely the mass crimes committed under Nazi rule, is deeply related to constructions of German national identity. To an extent, these issues will have to be touched upon, but they cannot be treated in any exhaustive or authoritative manner. As will be shown, however, especially in the closing chapters of this book, the observations on specific, postcolonial linkages between both countries and societies are not merely academic but of direct relevance to the politics of memory, couched in terms of the reconciliation, apology and reparation, that in recent years has evolved between Namibia and Germany.



The book falls into three broad parts. At the outset, the 'burden of history' is explored both from German and various Namibian perspectives. From the perspective of understanding actor constellations, this part explores the conceptual registers available to and employed by various groups of actors. The second part takes a closer look at Namibian memory practices that have worked and still do work as ways to preserve and reproduce memory content, in particular related to the genocide of 1904–08. Against the backdrop of these two parts, the third addresses the current transnational memory politics that since 1990 has evolved between Namibia and Germany, particularly the interrelated issues of apology and reparation.

To set the scene, chapter 1 presents a broad sketch of the relevant events from a Namibian perspective. Inevitably, this includes the ways the events of the early 20th Century have shaped later trajectories, in particular emergent Namibian nationalism. The chapter explores the way a hegemonic historical narrative was constructed in which many people from southern and central Namibia today say the historical experience of their own groups has been marginalised. The chapter includes a discussion of how the hegemonic narrative is currently represented in Namibia, particularly evident in representative architecture. Finally, I broach the different opportunities and means available in Namibia for groups to make their voices heard in a context of gross social inequality. In this way, I attempt to

survey not only historical material but also existing opportunities of conveying divergent views on such material.

This is followed in chapter 2 by a broadly parallel account of German colonialism, the impact of the genocide on Germany and the trajectory of colonial amnesia in Germany after World War II. In this context – as in many others – 1945 represents a clear rupture. Up to that point, in official accounts, the crimes of the *Schutztruppe* were celebrated as heroic achievements; later they were shrouded in silence. Colonial amnesia is set against the process in which the public mind in (West) Germany engaged the issue of the Holocaust over the post-war decades. The contrast that exists at first sight between official and public dealings with both issues diminishes when one considers the halting and recalcitrant attitude that characterised the drawn-out process of recognising the need to face up to the Holocaust and its various dimensions. In this way, present-day controversies about German responsibility for colonial crime are given a specific dimension, demonstrated with reference to the Namibian case. This gives the background for a closer look at the ‘special responsibility’ which Germany has assumed vis-à-vis Namibia, and which is held up as a kind of mantra in German official pronouncements.

The relationship between the genocide and the Holocaust is explored more directly in chapter 3. The main argument refers to the astounding publicity the genocide received in the contemporary German public. This may very well have contributed towards lowering the thresholds of what was considered as permissible deeds committed against adversaries in war or against members of what were considered subject or enemy peoples. Such a consideration complements arguments that show structural commonalities between the quest for a settlement colony pursued in Namibia and the strategies aimed at a German colonial sphere in Eastern Europe that were drawn up and pursued during the later phases of World War I and put into force with unprecedented systematic ruthlessness during World War II in the occupied Soviet territories. Here, I hope to help advance the debate, as it has suffered to an extent from coarse argument, as well as from the difficulty of giving a hearing to positions that may not be as mutually exclusive as some protagonists suppose.

As will emerge in the first two chapters, the notion of ‘Germany’ is important in Namibia and for Namibian memory politics. In chapter 4, I take a closer look at the construction of ‘Germany’ both by non-German speakers and by German speakers in Namibia. This involves complex identifications and differentiations with Germany and between Germany and German speakers in Namibia. The latter relationship is rehearsed in some historic depth, including some apparently long-term effects of Nazi influence during the 1930s, and interactions between German speakers and black Namibians. The chapter then deals with persistent German nationalist and also Nazi sentiments amongst German speaking Namibians. While such sentiments, at least in their more explicit forms, may be voiced by only small minorities, they can count on the indulgence of much of the community.

A specific strain of such underlying sentiments is taken up by exploring ‘the Namibian connection in denialism’. Chapter 5 lays bare the ways in which efforts to assail not only the interpretation, but also the historical facticity of the genocide, resonate between Namibia

and Germany through an array of websites as well as through letters to the editor of the Windhoek German daily, *Allgemeine Zeitung (AZ)*. Arguments that are invoked in this connection are examined paradigmatically with reference to Hinrich Schneider-Waterberg, who is shown to treat sources highly selectively to suit his purposes. The rationale of this exercise is given in the chapter's motto, taken from Theodor W. Adorno: 'The idiocy of all this actually signifies something not come to terms with, a wound, even though the thought of wounds should rather refer to victims'. The closing sections of the chapter demonstrate how denialist sentiments are replicated in parts of German academia and especially resonate in the pages of the *AZ*, as shown by an analysis for the period of late 2011 and early 2012.

Chapter 6 rounds off the first part of the book with an account of the meaning and fate of the Windhoek Rider (*Reiterdenkmal*). Up to late December 2013, this statue constituted a memorial to German colonialism, a present-day tourist attraction and a contested site in the Windhoek cityscape. The account shows the ambiguous and contradictory dimensions both of the Rider and of its position before it was removed to make place for the Independence Museum. In this way, the chapter draws together some of the threads laid out in preceding sections. Addressing the removal of the Rider in late 2013, the chapter contains references to the memory politics pursued by the Namibian government, which is treated more extensively in later chapters.

The second part of the book focuses on commemorative practices of groups affected by the genocide in Namibia. The background to these practices is given in chapter 7 which deals with the processes of communal reconstruction in the wake of the genocide and beyond. Briefly, various forms of this reconstitution are traced, taking examples from Ovaherero and Nama communities. This account touches on practices which until the present day feature prominently in commemorations. For example, the *oturupa* parades now form an essential component of any relevant event staged by Ovaherero.³ In closing, the chapter also notes the serious constraints that communal reconstruction faced under South African colonial rule.

Chapter 8 then gives close-up accounts of four annual commemorations observed by traditional communities in central and southern Namibia: Zeraeua Day in Omaruru, Herero Day in Okahandja, Heroes Day in Gibeon and the commemoration at Vaalgras. Based on personal observation, the proceedings are reported in detail, mainly as manifestations as well as reproduction of historical awareness and tradition. This entails the political dimension of each community asserting its rightful place in the history of anti-colonial struggle in Namibia. Pervasive features of the events reviewed are references to a warlike past, symbolised in the prominent role of horses possibly more than in the uniforms of the *oturupa*. These traits are linked especially to assertions of spatial claims that play out in quite distinct ways in all four cases reviewed. Such claims relate closely to the core rituals that take place around the gravesides of important leaders and, although in varying degrees and modalities, therefore refer to the Namibian War and the genocide.

3 To avoid inappropriate essentialisation, the definite article is omitted with ethnonyms at numerous points throughout the text. This usage is meant to denote that we usually cannot speak of a clearly bounded community, but that much more fuzzy identity processes prevail.

In chapter 9, the issue of a fragmented history is taken up against the backdrop of the preceding exposition. Presenting an array of quite diverse examples, I sketch out efforts by various actors and groups to shape and influence an image of national history in Namibia. Inevitably, such efforts point to constraints and exigencies, which have been the main focus of the review of the communal commemorations.

The final part of the book then brings the preceding issues and motives together in an account of the difficulties in transnational communication over a dire past within a postcolonial setting. This topic is pursued by looking into the diverse and changing constellations of concerns, interests and actors on the various sides involved. Inevitably, this leads to a rather sombre picture of the current situation, precisely on account of communication breaks or refusals to reach an understanding, or indeed, to 'negotiate'. These issues are raised first in the review of the 'mute conversation' (chapter 10) between high ranking representatives of the German state and Namibian, mostly Ovaherero, spokespersons, during the first few years of Namibian independence. This interaction was marked by gruff rebuffs from the German side, which form the background of a lawsuit filed by Ovaherero in the U.S. in 2001, initially directed against both the German Government and German corporations. However, up to the centennial year of 2004, the official German position remained unchanged.

Chapter 11 revolves around a much debated turn of events, the speech by the German Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development at the centennial commemoration at Ohamakari in 2004. The apology seemingly contained in this speech is critically analysed, and ensuing developments are recounted. After almost a decade, one can note considerable changes in the alignment of affected groups in Namibia and in the attitude of the Namibian Government, but also in civil society activism in Germany, along with very limited changes in German formal politics.

All these concerns and initiatives coalesced in 2011 with the dramatic events surrounding the return of 20 human skulls that had been deported from Namibia under German colonial rule. Chapter 12 contextualises the problem of human remains and then recounts the long story of this first restitution. By following this process, a painful one to many Namibian participants, one can see the persistent problems of Namibian–German memory politics in particularly sharp focus. To this picture a new dimension has been added by the internal Namibian controversy that was occasioned by the second repatriation of human remains from Germany in March 2014. In this way, the journey yet to be travelled is still a long one, and fraught with contradictions and pitfalls. In the very best of cases, resourceful and committed pilots are needed to negotiate the dangerous turns that have arisen from recent experience. As will emerge from the concluding remarks, the interrelated issues of truth seeking and telling, as well as of studied and imposed silence, remain relevant in charting such a journey.

1

Namibia's Century of Colonialism – a Fragmented Past in an Unequal Society

INDEPENDENCE CANNOT BE EXPECTED TO OBLITERATE A NATION'S COLONIAL PAST WITH one stroke. Namibia is certainly a case in point. For slightly more than a century after the commencement of formal colonial rule in 1884, the country experienced particularly harsh colonial rule under two consecutive colonising powers. The effects of this experience are uneven over Namibia's vast and unevenly populated territory. The forms of anti-colonial resistance that went with colonial rule, from its beginning until its end in 1990, also varied greatly.

For all this diversity, it was precisely within the context of anti-colonial struggles that the common concerns of Namibia began to be articulated early on.

However, galvanising regional diversity into a national nexus remained a daunting task at the time of independence. Note that Namibia, as well as most African countries, was not much different in this respect from any other nascent nation state that had emerged during the preceding two centuries in various parts of the world (Kössler 1994: chs 2–4), including in Western Europe, from where the modern nation state originates. In contradistinction to views commonly conveyed by op-eds, as well as by some scholarly works, boundaries of modern states have never been natural ones. In classical nation-states such as France or Germany it took long-term and sustained state action, including manifest violence and war, to produce the image of cultural and linguistic homogeneity projected today. It is well known that the activities that went with such quests were not always attractive or benign, since they tended to include discrimination at home and expansionism and colonialism abroad. Nevertheless, Namibia has also faced specific problems that are by no means overcome after a quarter century of independence. To a large extent, these problems go back to the specifics

of the country's colonial experience. In particular, the consequences of settler colonialism in the central and southern regions still impact seriously on social structure as well as on debates about policy priorities, and in connection with this, affect public memory and the image of the nation and its past. Not least, this past is linked to a current social structure that makes Namibia one of the few states where internal inequality exceeds overall global inequality. Such gross social inequality is linked to unusually stark regional divergence in historical experience.

The present chapter recapitulates some of the relevant experience. In this way, I wish to bring out those features of regionally and socially diverse experiences and memorial agendas that make the image of the past a contested terrain in today's Namibia – more so than in quite a few other countries in Africa and beyond.¹ These differences will then be placed in context with the diverse chances and possibilities that exist for various groups to give voice to their concerns and agendas. The diverse chances and potentials are illustrated by drawing on a range of memorial practices.

COLONIALISM, RESISTANCE, RESILIENCE

Contrary to a widespread notion, formal colonisation in Namibia did not, strictly speaking, commence in 1884 with the declaration of a German protectorate after the acquisition of Angra Pequena (!Nami+Nūs) by the Bremen merchant, Adolf Lüderitz. Six years earlier, Britain had annexed the only really suitable harbour on the Namibian coast, Walvis Bay, and placed it under the control of the Cape Colony. This event is important, less for its territorial consequences, which finally came to an end with the town's incorporation into independent Namibia in 1994, than for the fact that the annexation was the outflow of a larger diplomatic process which had been set into motion by Ovaherero *ovahona*. In fear of a Boer incursion from the east, they had requested the protection of the Cape government. Subsequently, Cape envoy Palgrave negotiated for years with the various *ovahona* and *kapteins* in central and southern Namibia (see Wallace 2011: 105–9). The episode clearly underscores both the diplomatic acumen of African leaders in the region and their awareness of serious risks pending in the near future. Even though Palgrave's missions did not result in the intended protection treaties, African communities and their leaders were seen at the time as independent actors in regional, and by implication, international relations. There is little reason to suspect that this was otherwise when the first German commissioner made his rounds a few years later and effectively sealed treaties with most of the local and regional leaders.

The following century was marked by great and shattering social upheavals accompanied by violent confrontations. This is important to note in the face of a colonial image which

1 Such diversity of viewpoints and approaches has been testified by the celebrations of 50th independence anniversaries across the continent, see Lentz & Korneš 2011.

claims that colonisation brought peace to a country in turmoil, as emblematically phrased in one German account which suggests a trajectory 'from no man's country to orderly state' (Rafalski 1930).

One should be careful not to play off the practices of violent penetration and domination of one colonial power against those of another. This implies the risk of exonerating one of those powers or even colonialism at large (Kössler 2004a). Nevertheless, the thirty years of German rule in Namibia are marked by virtually continuous warfare, even though spread over various regions and with clear variations in intensity. The targets of the various campaigns of subjection for quelling resistance also changed. During the 1880s and 1890s, warfare was focused on the centre and the south, successively directed against a range of Nama and Ovaherero (Ovambanderu) groups. Primary resistance up to 1894 is symbolised by the visionary figure of *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi, with his obstinate resistance and his clairvoyant pronouncements on the dangers of colonialism and also on the need for leaders to unite against the invaders in what is today southern and central Namibia (Witbooi 1995). The fate of Ovaherero/Ovambanderu leaders Kahimemua and Nikodemus, who were executed by the colonial power in 1896 with the connivance of their rival Samuel Maharero, attests to the deep contradictions that followed from colonial intrusion and that were played upon and exacerbated by the colonial divide and rule strategy.² Both instances attest to African insight into colonialism and to clear, if unsuccessful, strategies to oppose it.

Anti-colonial resistance came to a head in the Namibian War, the period of 1903–1908 which encompassed a series of military confrontations between a range of African polities and colonial power. This war came at the end of a decade of more or less continuous warfare, in which Governor Leutwein followed a divide and rule strategy to victimise individual communities and divest them of their land. When in October, 1903, violent conflict escalated at the south-eastern fringe of the territory, between the colonial military and the Bondelswarts at their capital at Warmbad, this may have seemed like another case in the long string of military campaigns. However, the effort to quell the Bondelswarts' resistance drew most colonial troops to the far south. Therefore, when another confrontation, this time with the great majority of Ovaherero, flared up in January, 1904 in Okahandja, in the centre of the country,³ the region was practically devoid of an effective colonial fighting force. Under strict instructions to restrict the killing of settlers to German men, Ovaherero forces quickly established control of most of central Namibia, except for the towns where small German garrisons held out. Ovaherero cut railway lines and besieged fortifications. In this way, Ovaherero resistance constituted a real threat to the colonial power and scored early victories (Ngavirue 2011). This crisis of defending colonial domination triggered hasty efforts to field additional German troops.

The Namibian War of 1903–1908 culminated in genocidal action by the colonial power. After the inconclusive battle at Ohamakari (Waterberg) on August 11, 1904, Ovaherero

2 Gewald 1999: ch. 4; Tjituka et al. 1987: 30–51; Sundermeier 1977: 41–66.

3 The exact course of events that triggered the war is still not quite established (see Gewald 1999: 142–56).

made their retreat mostly in an easterly direction. Contrary to widespread assumptions, recent oral sources have drawn attention to tales of dogged resistance during this retreat (Förster 2010: 141–75). Still, there is no doubt that tens of thousands perished in the waterless sandveld,⁴ and furthermore, no doubt that Commanding General Lothar von Trotha's intention was to eliminate the Ovaherero people from the colony, either by forcing them over the border or – as with the overwhelming majority – by leaving them to perish from hunger and thirst. By today's standards, the execution of such stated intention is tantamount to genocide. This genocidal intention is documented in Trotha's infamous proclamation of October 2, 1904, also known as the Extermination Order. In this proclamation, the military commander declared that the Ovaherero were no longer imperial subjects, which meant the German state abrogated any obligation to leniency or protection. In addition, the proclamation called for the elimination of all Ovaherero from the colony, either by death or emigration.⁵

After the virtual defeat of the Ovaherero, most of the Nama groups residing in southern Namibia took up arms in early October, 1904. This was the beginning of a much more extended campaign, since the Nama employed guerrilla tactics and skilfully used their knowledge of terrain and environment. The last groups were defeated only in 1909 (Bühler 2003: 291–328). A proclamation similar to that of October 2, 1904 was directed at the fighting Nama on April 25, 1905. This document pointedly referred to the fate of the Ovaherero to warn the Nama that continued resistance would lead them down the same path (Kriegsgesch. Abt. 1907: 186).

In this way, diverse phases of the war saw shifting regional theatres of action and diverse ethnic clusters as main collective actors. Overall, the war involved anti-colonial resistance by the great majority of these groups. German military strategy and action to put down this resistance was genocidal. The 1948 UN Convention for the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide⁶ focuses on the intent to destroy groups targeted by the perpetrator. Actions to do so included a range of modalities besides the mere killing of people. Thus the measures taken by the colonial power outside direct military action can be considered a part of the genocide since they contributed towards annihilating the victims as a group and destroying their means of survival.⁷

Thus, the perpetration of genocide took several forms:⁸ First, there was direct military action, in particular sealing off the waterless Omaheke after the battle of Ohamakari. A

4 It is of little consequence whether the Omaheke was dry due to particularly poor rains or due to permanent conditions; this forms, among other issues, part of current denialist discourse, see ch. 5.

5 For the well-known text, along with discussions, see Hull 2005: 5; Gewald 1999: 172–3; Pool 1991: 272. Some of the issues surrounding this proclamation are taken up in ch. 5.

6 The text appears, i.a. in Gellately & Kiernan 2003: 381–4; and on <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html> (14.2.2014); the above issues are taken up again below, see chs. 2, 3 and 5.

7 For this reason, concern with numbers, mostly with the intent to deflect the issue of genocide (Tröndle 2012, see ch. 5; Schneider-Waterberg 2011; Lau 1995b), misses the decisive criteria; this has also been broached to an extent in the earlier stages of the reparations campaign, see Harring 2002: ch. 10.

8 Note that contrary to some of the literature (Häussler 2013), the notion of genocide according to the UN Convention of 1948 is not restricted to the physical killing of target groups.

more protracted time period saw the erection of concentration camps, where surviving Ovaherero as well as Nama who had capitulated were interned wholesale, men, women, children and elderly people. The only reason for their imprisonment was obviously that they were considered to belong to ethnic groups who took part in the resistance. These people were not treated as prisoners of war and were denied the protection called for at the time by international treaties.⁹ Such treatment amounted to continuing the murderous campaign by other means, even after the original military orders had been rescinded. Concentration camps, along with forced labour, particularly in the cool and moist climate of the coastal towns of Swakopmund and Lüderitz,¹⁰ meant inevitable death for thousands (Zeller 2008a; Erichsen 2008, 2005). According to current estimates, up to 80% of Ovaherero and 50% of Nama were killed during the war, approximately 100,000 people.

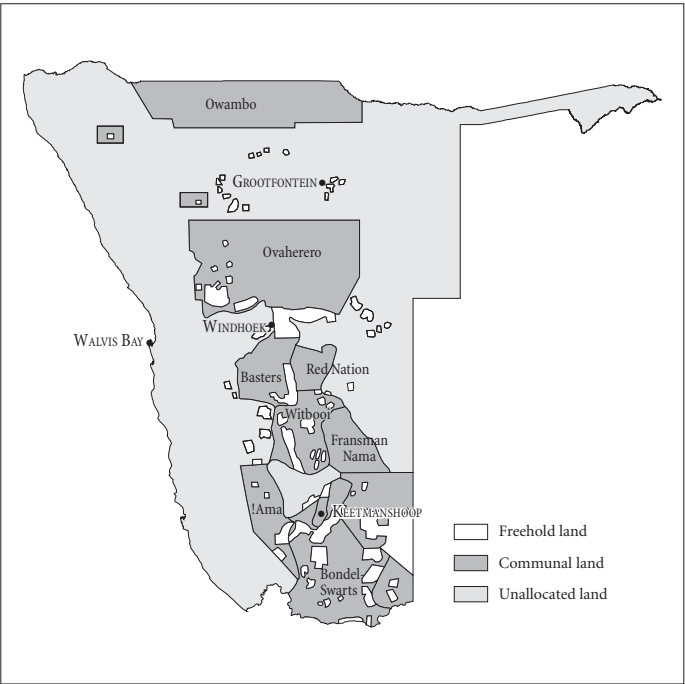
After the official end of hostilities in 1907, and the closing of concentration camps in the following year, the decimated survivors were subjected to the stiff measures of Native Ordinances that provided for land expropriation, deportation, forced labour and other restrictions (Zimmerer 2001: 68–84; Drechsler 1966: 231–2). Even these ordinances form part of a genocidal strategy that was bent to achieve the aims which had been at the core of the colonial quest in Namibia from the beginning: by the wholesale expropriation of the land of all 'insurgent' groups and its conversion into crown land, the survivors of the genocide were bereft of any means of autonomous sustenance. The socio-economic pressure that was established in this way to force indigenous people into wage labour was compounded further by an obligation to work under strict administrative surveillance. Further provisions banned indigenes from owning cattle. In this way, additional barriers were created against economic independence. At the same time, such a ban amounted to the destruction of Ovaherero ritual practice which hinges on sacred cattle. Lastly, indigenes were forbidden to settle or converge in large groups, and they were subjected to stiff pass laws. In this way, efforts to procure a labour force and establish strict control over surviving Africans went hand in hand.

Africans were thus to be pressed into the role of a chattel labour force, regimented to serve the needs of settler agriculture. At the same time, the country was thoroughly reorganised in ways that are evident even today. Central and southern Namibia was forged into a region of commercial agriculture with huge tracts of land devoted to farms mainly pursuing open range cattle and small stock agriculture. The countryside remains devoid of human homesteads and settlements that dominate the scene, for example, such as in neighbouring Botswana. Apart from the commercial farmers, farm labourers with their families are accommodated on the farms. The status of these workers and their right to stay are both subject to their formal employment on the farm. So far, only very few of such farms have passed into indigenous African hands since independence. Thus, very little has changed in this basic set-up, which originated in the aftermath of the genocide.

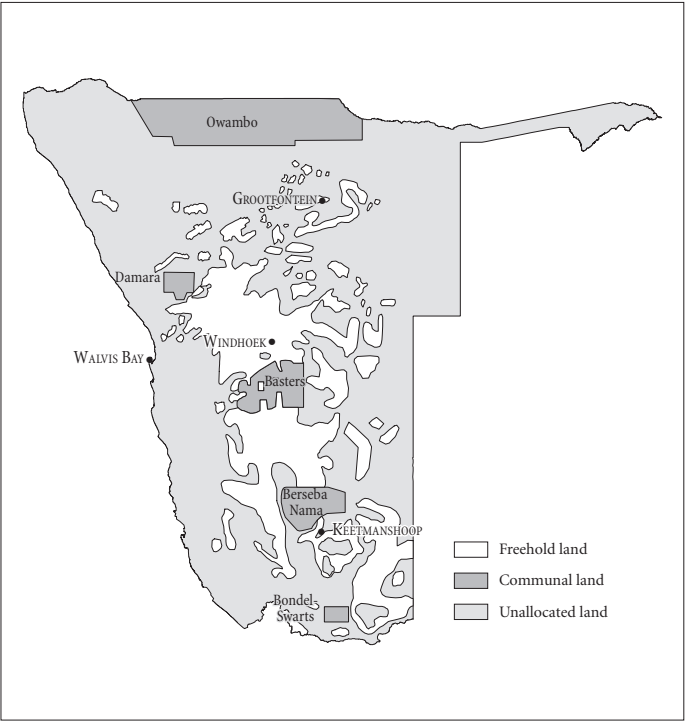
9 On the exemption of colonised people from provisions of international law see Kleinschmidt 2013.

10 Renamed !Nami#Nūs in 2013; throughout, the now historical name of 'Lüderitz' will be used in colonial contexts.

MAP 2 Map of Namibia in 1902 showing unallocated land, communal land and freehold land before the genocide. Data from Mendelsohn (et al.) 2002. *Atlas of Namibia.*



MAP 3 Map of Namibia in 1911 showing unallocated land, communal land and freehold land after the genocide. Data from Mendelsohn (et al.) 2002. *Atlas of Namibia.*



The intent to subvert forever any African autonomy was reinforced by large scale removals of population, which however was only partly effective. Still, an important centre in the south such as Gibeon, the traditional capital of the Witbooi group (IKhowesen), was devoid of Nama speakers for some years, while Ovaherero from the centre were settled there by force (Kössler 2005b: 181–2). Plans to deport Ovaherero as far as German Samoa did not materialise, while groups of Nama actually were deported to Togo and Cameroon, in the latter instance, as late as 1911 (Kössler 2005b: 181–2; Krüger 1999: 138–41). Even though to a considerable extent such plans effectively amounted to ‘fantasies of omnipotence’ (Krüger 1999: 135), they decisively informed colonial strategy geared towards creating an ‘artfully designed garden’ (Melber 1992: 110) – an objective closely related to the origins of totalitarian rule (Bauman 1991: 26–39).

These plans and measures dovetailed with the goal proclaimed by Trotha in 1904 and 1905, namely to eliminate indigenous groups from the territory of the colony. To these genocidal strategies must be added the ‘Bushman hunts’ that got under way shortly after the official close of the great wars of African resistance in 1907–08, with the genocidal ordinance of October 14, 1911 (Gordon 1992: 57–9; 2009). These actions by the colonial power contradict the images of tranquillity sometimes associated with the closing years of German rule.

In the aftermath of the Namibian War, and through the war making of the German troops, then, the basis for a ‘society of privilege’ (Zimmerer 2001: 94) was laid. In important ways, this social arrangement prefigured Apartheid, which some forty years later was systematised in South Africa and also in Namibia, then occupied by South Africa. With reference to the extent of inequality that still prevails in Namibia today, decisive features of such a society of privilege have shaped social relations in the country up to the present. Land distribution issues that have come to the fore with a vengeance in recent years form only one, largely symbolic, dimension of such inequality, which pertains also to income, property, education, life opportunities and more generally, economic clout and power (see also ch. 4).

Overall, a succession of cataclysmic mass killings beset different ethnic groups in central and southern Namibia at different times. What emerges during the thirty years of German colonial rule is a complex trajectory of colonial violence which led up to genocide in a ruthless effort to impose foreign state structures and exploitative socio-economic relations. At the same time, German colonial rule with all its consequences was not imposed evenly over the territory which today forms the Republic of Namibia. Up to 1915, colonial rule, along with sweeping land expropriation and the beginnings of systematic European settlement, was imposed on most parts of central and southern Namibia. The northern regions outside the aptly christened Police Zone – the area of effective colonial control – were touched only intermittently or experienced only the establishment of isolated outposts of colonial police and military forces. Still, in particular Ndonga, under King Nehale, supported Ovaherero resistance in 1904 by attacking Fort Namutoni, and northern communities received a fair number of Ovaherero refugees (Schaller 2008; Gewald 1999: 177, 178).

As mentioned previously, genocide does not necessarily imply the complete physical annihilation of the target group. The charge hinges on the intent to destroy the group as such. Therefore, not only will some people survive the cataclysm, but the chance for re-assembly exists as well. Communal nexuses can be reconstructed, albeit in significantly changed forms. In Namibia, such processes are most evident among the groups most directly affected by the wars of 1903–1908. Quests for reconstruction set in shortly after the catastrophe, or even while it was still going on. Take for example the modicum of organisation and traditional leadership upheld by Witbooi exiles even when living in Dschang, Cameroon, after their deportation in 1911 (Kössler 2005b: 181–2). Such efforts to reconstitute at least a semblance of former life and relationships are also apparent in strategies reminiscent of the ‘Weapons of the Weak’ (Scott 1985). Thus, employing various ruses of evasion and clandestine ways of communication, Ovaherero (re-) established networks throughout the country (Krüger 1999: 184–94). As has been shown in recent research, survival and communal reconstruction are closely linked to a ‘continuum of violence’, and the war remained ‘interwoven into the experiences, narratives and representations of later violent experiences’, up to the point that ‘historical temporalities were . . . collapsed’ as described in oral accounts (M. Biwa 2012: 138–142; also 133–4; 2010: 348; Kössler 2011a).

In the course of World War I, South Africa occupied Namibia after a brief military campaign in 1915. This ushered in a change of colonial power that also brought certain changes for Africans. The much more populous northern regions that had been left largely untouched during the period of German colonial rule were brought under the control of the colonial state by the new colonial power. Besides the Northern Campaign in 1917, such efforts took the form of a small administrative presence. The mobilisation of migrant labour power was occasioned largely by natural disasters and then stabilised (Hayes 1998).

Important instances of violent repression include the death of Mandume Ndemufayo in fighting the South Africans in 1917, and the deposition of Chief Iipumbu in 1932 (Hartmann 1998). The fall of Mandume entailed a sweeping reorganisation of Kwanyama, the largest Oshiwambo speaking community (Shiweda 2012). Quite spectacular degrees of violence were brought to bear further south when the Bondelswarts rose once again in resistance in 1922 and were bombed by the fledgling South African air force, and to a lesser degree, there was violence in quelling the Rehoboth Rebellion some three years later.

However, there remained very substantial differences in the colonial experience of the communal areas of the former Police Zone and the north. In a nutshell, the difference may be summarised as those under indirect rule and those under much more immediate control. This can be seen also on the symbolic level of recognition/non-recognition of traditional leadership by the colonial power. Whereas chiefs in the north were treated with considerable respect as long as they remained broadly loyal to the colonial power, in the south and centre the administration made a point of denying leaders titles such as ‘chief’ or ‘*Kaptein*’, and restricted them to the lowly official status of ‘headmen’ (Kössler 2005b: 225–32). While ‘natives’ in the Police Zone were systematically denied the right to possess

firearms or their use was strictly regimented, rifles were regular presents to chiefs in the north during the interwar years,¹¹ even though in other respects control over the northern areas was enforced step by step (Emmett 1999: ch. 9).

Above all, the main colonial concern in the population centres in the north revolved around the mobilisation of labour power, and resembled indirect rule arrangements found at the time in other parts of Africa, specifically in British colonies (Wallace 2011: 221–3, 232–5; du Pisani 1986: 58). For those affected by the resultant policies, these had serious consequences, above all in terms of migrant labour. Still, colonial intervention remained limited. On the other hand, the quest for control in the southern and central reserves was all-encompassing, not least on account of the close proximity of these areas to regions of settler agriculture (Kössler 2005b, part I; 2000). This also meant that in the north, no expropriation of land took place at the scale experienced in the Police Zone. In the south and centre, the South African administration dashed hopes for change, particularly in this respect, and built on the clear slate left by the Germans. Certainly, a number of 'native reserves' were proclaimed in the Police Zone from the 1920s onwards, yet they were kept under strict surveillance by specially appointed 'Superintendents' or 'Welfare Officers' (Kössler 2005b: 35–40, 2000; Werner 1998: 102–8).

Small pockets of territory were owned by communities under a variety of conditions reached with the German colonial power.¹² Settler agriculture, in many ways the mainstay of settler society, was not viable without the cheap labour power secured by regimented migration from the northern regions. Migratory labour made a huge imprint on northern communities, and at the same time re-enforced ethnically coded differentiations in the Police Zone and also in the country at large (Emmett 1999: 257–66; Moorsom 1982: 30–6). For many black Namibians, above all within the Police Zone, the advent of South African rule was linked to hopes for redress of the wrongs and losses they had suffered during the previous three decades (Ngavirue 1997: 185). Such expectations were disappointed almost instantly. At first, when South Africa still needed to consolidate its control, the Police Zone went through a phase of 'tentative liberalism' (Emmett 1988: 229). The new administrators were still groping to find their way, and the League of Nations mandate to legalise South Africa's position was not finally secured until late 1920. This South African policy in Namibia was set on 'annexation in all but name,' as Prime Minister Jan Smuts worded it (as quoted in du Pisani 1986: 56). In any case, during a brief period shortly after the occupation, while the new regime was still consolidating its grip, people had been able to relocate to their former home regions in 'a spontaneous drift to traditional centres' (Ngavirue 1997: 185; see also ch. 7).

11 National Archives of Namibia, South West Africa Administration A-files (SWAA), file A 150/188: Information for annual report 1945–1946; subfile Ic: Extent to which tribes are armed; Native Commissioner, Ovamboland to Secretary for South West Africa, Windhoek, Ondangua 25th March 1931. NAN, SWAA A50/15, v2, Native Affairs: Presents to and from Native Chiefs.

12 These were, upon various legal bases, the Nama territories of Berseba, Bondels and Soromas in the south and Okombahe, related to Damara, in the central West.

The momentum of such politics emerged into the open immediately after the close of World War II. In particular, South Africa's drive to incorporate Namibia as a fifth province provoked fierce resistance; add to this an energetic drive for church independence, for decent schooling and generally for a 'voice' through the breakaway of most Nama evangelists and teachers from the Rhenish mission in the south (Kössler 1999a; Silvester 1993: 183–93; Sundermeier 1973). These developments ran roughly parallel to the incorporation campaign. Conventional accounts pay too little attention to the sustained campaign of petitioning to the United Nations (UN) that continued for roughly a decade. In his famous initiative, the Rev. Michael Scott, after various visits to Namibia and working with Hosea Kutako and other chiefs such as Dawid Witbooi in the south, assembled evidence that eventually was presented to the UN to refute South African claims about popular assent to incorporation (du Pisani 1986: 114; Troup 1950).

During the following years, the Herero Chiefs' Council played a central role, also despatching young, enterprising Namibians to represent their cause abroad, above all at the United Nations in New York. Significantly, those making their escape through neighbouring Botswana were supported at the time by resident Ovaherero, who were often descendants of refugees from 1904. This happened regardless of the emigrants' ethnic identities; they were received just for being Namibians (J.A. Müller 2010, 2012). Furthermore, the Herero Chiefs' Council acted in alliance with leading Nama, in particular with the incumbent *Kaptein* of the !Khowesen. Thus, petitions were signed jointly by Hosea Kutako and Dawid Witbooi. Later, Dawid Witbooi's successor, Hendrik Samuel Witbooi, signed 'on behalf of the non-European inhabitants of SWA' (as quoted in Kössler 2005b: 237). In this way, the *Kaptein* self-consciously claimed a representative position, but did so in a non-parochial, national role. His action also highlights the way in which the initiatives of traditional leaders were enmeshed with the emergence of a nexus which began to encompass all inhabitants of the territory.

During the second half of the 1950s, the Herero Chiefs' Council above all, combined with the *Ozohoze*, a group of activists, gathered around Hosea Kutako (Ngavirue 1997: 203, 210) and became one of the mainstays of nascent Namibian nationalism. Significantly, the *Ozohoze* comprised persons from other ethnic groups besides Ovaherero (Emmett 1999: 292). The Council's authority was not limited to ethnic Ovaherero, but it worked rather to organise across ethnic boundaries, despatching persons into exile – to work with the United Nations – and making arrangements to help those who were forced to flee the country (J.A. Müller 2010).

The formation of nationalist organisations, first SWANU and shortly thereafter SWAPO, was linked to a differentiation within this broad alliance. Roughly, the former reflected the formation of a fledgling intelligentsia, while the latter articulated also a growing socio-political role of migrant workers from the north (Emmett 1999: ch. 11; Ngavirue 1997: 219). The organisational history of the liberation movement and SWAPO's ascendancy cannot be related here in full. Importantly, however, SWAPO's leadership group soon focused on diplomatic activities in exile. These initiatives took their cue

from Namibia's special legal status as a Mandated Territory under the League of Nations and now a 'trust betrayed', and were closely linked to an emphasis on the armed struggle (Dobbell 1998). Trajectories inside Namibia were also related to this. In particular, the avoidance of armed struggle by Herero Paramount Clemens Kapuuo, during the 1970s, was motivated by the experience of the colonial wars, namely the suffering of 'the tribes of the central and southern parts of South West Africa' under two consecutive colonial regimes (as quoted in Katjavivi 1988: 93). As Gewald (2004: 562) notes, Kapuuo 'opposed all calls to arms', and he 'knew full well what war had brought to the Herero of central Namibia'. This attitude may have motivated a strategy that led Kapuuo's party, NUDO, to embark on the South African sponsored internal solution attempts of the late 1970s and 1980s. However, Kapuuo's approach was not a foregone conclusion following from painful historical experience, as is shown by a considerable number of southern chiefs joining SWAPO around the same time and thus adding to the organisation's nation-wide appeal (Kössler 2005b: 241–2; Katjavivi 1988: 100).

In this way, the roots of the broad independence and liberation movement were regionally uneven. This movement coalesced on a national scale, and again, diversified at various turning points. One decisive split was connected with the Turnhalle Conference in 1975, which lured sizeable groups who had been involved in the earlier stages of the independence movement, into the fold of what amounted to collaboration in a South Africa sponsored internal solution without international legitimacy. Again, the liberation struggle, in which SWAPO achieved ascendancy in the course of the 1960s, remained a multi-pronged and complex socio-political process. One important characteristic of this process was Namibia's exceptional position in international law. The country's status as a mandated territory that was now unlawfully occupied by South Africa made the future of Namibia an important issue in global politics. Within the UN system, specific structures were created, in particular the UN Council for Namibia, as the repository of rightful sovereignty while independence was still denied by South Africa. At the same time, the recognition of SWAPO as the only rightful representative of the Namibian people by the UN gave the organisation a unique status. These features clearly contributed towards the pivotal role which diplomacy took on in SWAPO's exile politics. Diplomatic status and recognition were again closely connected with the armed struggle. This was certainly a last resort in the face of intransigent colonial occupation, but effective armed struggle was also treated as a prerequisite for recognition as a *bona fide* liberation movement, not only by the then OAU and its Liberation Committee, but also by important donors such as Nordic countries (Sellström 2002: 233–61). Moreover, a kind of competition amongst various organisations had resulted even earlier during the 1960s, in efforts to create military wings and thus to secure these credentials for themselves. It is well known that only SWAPO succeeded (J.A. Müller 2012: ch. 8). This situation entailed a tension between the military and the non-military aspects of the struggle that is still felt today, not least in memory politics.

It is often forgotten that besides its military component, the liberation struggle involved broad layers of civil society. These included workers and their unions who sparked off the

general strike in 1971 and were vital to the militancy of the 1980s (Bauer 1998: ch. 2, 52–6, 76–9); the prophetic churches which provided spiritual guidance as well as organisation networks and conduits for material assistance (Tötemeyer 2010; Buys & Nambala 2003; Steenkamp 1995); and students of various categories who, among others, helped to initiate the community schools that were founded in the south as alternatives to South African sponsored institutions (Joas 1994). In this, and in many other respects, traditional leaders played essential roles as far as they joined the liberation movement, which was the case in a number of regions such as large parts of the south.¹³

New departures in mobilising and organising women, many clearly outside established forms, were another important feature of the upsurge of social and political activity during the 1980s (Becker 1993). Significantly, many civil society initiatives and structures that had been active in the 1980s (Strauss 1985) evaporated during the years following independence. Such organisational discontinuities may have contributed towards the specific image of the liberation struggle that focuses on the military dimension in the north. Even in that region, unsung heroines who did not carry arms themselves tend to be left out of the hegemonic narrative.¹⁴ The tension between internal and external movement, organisation and leadership, and the associated rift between civil and military action, featured in many of the ‘crises’ that marked the exiled leadership’s dealings with the challenges arising from younger recruits and newly arrived exiles from inside the country.¹⁵ Moreover, persistent celebration of ‘military images of the liberation struggle’ in official memory practice sits uneasily with a pervasive emphasis on national reconciliation (Hunter 2008a: 155), even though such reconciliation may be defined only in vague terms.

Lastly, the Namibian independence conflict was enmeshed, all through its closing decade, in the overarching conflict that has been aptly called the ‘Thirty Years War’ in southern Africa (Saul 2008, 2014: 19–20). The People’s Liberation Army of Namibia was engaged in largely conventional warfare in Angola, as part of the fight that pitted them, along with Angolan government forces and a Cuban expeditionary corps, against the South African army and its UNITA surrogates. Namibian independence came as a result of a larger effort to resolve this situation after the stalemate at Cuito Cuanevale in 1988 (Dosman 2008). SWAPO was not part of the tripartite negotiations between Angola, South Africa and the USA. However, the agreement reached in that process provided for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 (1978), which had been agreed upon by all parties concerned more than a decade before.

The constitution writing that ensued after the elections of late 1989 and prior to the independence date of 21 March, 1990, took the form of an historical compromise. SWAPO had emerged from the elections as the incontestable victor, but had failed to reach a two-thirds majority, and therefore needed to secure the cooperation of other parties. This

13 For two case studies, see Kössler 2005a: 166–72, 232–48.

14 Namhila 2009; on the role of women more generally, see most recently Akawa 2014.

15 Leys & Saul 1994, pp. 123–47, Leys & Saul 1995: 42–58; for an account by one of those implicated, see Nathanael 2002.

concerned, most notably, the strongest opposition party that emerged from the independence elections, the DTA. This party had been the main force in the South African sponsored intermediary governments since the late 1970s. Materially, there were serious constraints on reaching agreement with those who controlled the economy and administration and who could easily create havoc and derail the transition.

Eventually, the Constitution provided extensive guarantees both for property, including land, and for the civil service establishment. These guarantees placed serious constraints on the government after independence. In this way, the settlement entrenched existing privilege. In Namibia, and shortly after in South Africa, the transition from colonialism and racist domination to democracy was not complemented by a transformation of ingrained structures of gross inequality, let alone by a revolution in social relations (Howarth 1998: 203). In a symbolic way, this lack of fundamental change is apparent from the sluggish pace of land reform, that digresses sharply from SWAPO's former programme, but has led to land appropriations by parts of the liberation elite (Melber 2014c: 44–8; Kaapama 2010, 2007). Before, during the 1980s, attempts at an internal settlement favoured the emergence of a 'black middle class', while the accession of a liberation elite to status and privilege now resulted in the formation of a 'new bureaucratic bourgeoisie' (Tapscott 1995: 163) and the emergence of a 'blackoisie' more linked to entrepreneurship (Winterfeld 2010: 152). Since independence, all these groups have been bound together in an elite compromise that has coalesced into an elite pact (Melber 2014b: ch. 2). From a current perspective, commenting on critical issues, Töttemeyer (2013: 49) even speaks of a 'predator elite', 'cocooned' from the rest of society and in particular, from the impoverished majority.

Overall, the projection of the liberation war as the central event in Namibian history obscures the experience of the central and southern regions and their contribution towards the struggle against colonialism. In particular, the momentous and harsh events and catastrophes around the Namibian War that marked primary anti-colonial resistance, and the genocide perpetrated to break it, are pushed to the background in this way (see also Zuern 2012: 496–9). As previously indicated, this event shaped the socio-economic circumstances of the whole of Namibia for the ensuing century or more, by clearing the space and creating the foundations for the settler economy, which, through the intermediary of the migratory labour system, eventually worked also to transform the northern regions not directly affected by the genocide or German rule.

As the following section will show, these problems of remembering and privileging particular features of historical experience are reflected vividly in the Namibian memory landscape. The pattern which will emerge is also deeply marked by the consequences of colonial rule. The colonisers on the one hand and the colonised on the other had grossly unequal opportunities for projecting their concerns and views of the past into stones, concrete and bronze. Such unevenness, harking back to colonial times, is conveyed in recent drives to change the prevailing memory landscape, associated above all with the protracted conflict and argument around the Rider Statue (see ch. 6).

WINDHOEK MEMORY LANDSCAPE

In a tangible way, the view over the capital city of Windhoek presents testimony to the current state of public memory in Namibia. Here, monuments and representative buildings from the colonial era not only still dominate the scenery, but these structures also attest to the compromise surrounding the transition to independence. This compromise appears in the combination of efforts to represent the past and the more mundane concerns of catering for tourist interests. In spite of recent changes, obviously skewed memory content is presented by central and key monuments and buildings.¹⁶ Two decades into independence, the preponderance of colonial buildings in the centre of the capital remained largely unchanged. Other major building efforts such as the imposing Heroes' Acre and the huge new State House have been placed outside the city centre and exert no influence over its memory landscape. To some extent, the situation has been changed by the construction of the Independence Memorial Museum which has been inserted into the core group of colonial buildings which formed the 'city crown'. However, the colonial ensemble remains prominent, and includes the conspicuous church building, *Christuskirche*, until recently, the Rider Statue (*Reiterdenkmal*) and the former German colonial citadel (*Alte Feste*). As important tourist features, these are signposted with their German names in the Central Business District (CBD), at the corner of Zoo Park and at strategic spots. From the CBD, these sites are reached by a steep slope on a street lined by colonial style buildings on the upper section. The *Christuskirche* at the top of what is now Fidel Castro Street once had a commanding position in the cityscape and still looks imposing in spite of its rather modest proportions and its almost playful, baroque style. In addition, the church steeple marks the horizon point for numerous streets of the city centre.

The *Christuskirche* was built at the behest of Emperor William II and consecrated in 1910. It forms part of an array of systematically named churches of the same name deemed to document German protestant presence and ascendancy in important places around the world. The sites of the churches thus built included, besides capitals of German colonies, Jerusalem (Braun 2014: 37; Speitkamp 2000: 167). However, the *Christuskirche* also stands for local imperial agenda. As a former pastor of the white protestant congregation remarked in retrospect, the church was expected 'to outlast, with the stony might of its construction the many modest little brick churches of the mission, to become a symbol of the dignity of the victorious German Empire'.¹⁷ In this way, standing high on the hillside and overlooking the central part of the capital, the *Christuskirche* may well be considered the epitome – at

16 For a comparative perspective on the postcolonial development of capital cities in southern Africa (Harare, Lusaka, Windhoek) and continuity and change in their symbolic landscapes, see Simon 1992: 157–9, which reflects some of the initial changes in Windhoek and underlines the continuing colonial pattern. For a discourse analysis on a capital as 'representative of the nation', see Caborn 2006: 57.

17 H.F.W. Anz (ed.) in *Evangelischer Gemeinderat zu Windhuk, 25 Jahre Christuskirche in Windhuk*, Windhoek 1935, as quoted in Hinz 2012: 368, and checked against the original, quoted in Hinz 2011: 382–3.



FIG. 1.1 Signposts at the interchange of Independence Avenue/ Fidel Castro Street, showing the prominence given to German colonial buildings. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

least in Namibia – of the Manichean division between the ‘city of the coloniser’ and the ‘city of the colonised’, as famously invoked by Frantz Fanon (1961: 32).

Moreover, built in part on the site of the concentration camp where Africans were imprisoned during the Namibian War, *Christuskirche* marks the victory of the colonial power. This thrust is underlined by the eight monumental bronze plates that occupy most of the southern wall inside the building. These plates were installed in 1923. They commemorate as heroes all German soldiers and civilians who died during the German colonial period in armed confrontation and war (Zeller 1999). In keeping with this, the former Windhoek pastor, Anz, in his address for the 25th anniversary of the *Christuskirche* in 1935, noted that the church was ‘a symbol of the dignity of the victorious German Empire.’¹⁸ In addition, one of the motives for the erection of this church had been the demand for separation strongly articulated by the German protestant congregation at the time. They considered it unacceptable to share even a church building with a black congregation. Very explicitly, then, this building was meant as ‘the church for the whites’ (Hinz 2012: 367), following the building of the Rhenish Mission church some years before on Church Hill (Hinz 2012: 358–62). Today, it is doubtful that this background is in the minds of many of the motorists who circle the building on Robert Mugabe Avenue, or of the young couples who see it as a favourite site for their wedding ceremonies. The official handing over of the church building in 2010 by the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), which was still formally the proprietor, to the separate German speaking church in Namibia (DELK) evoked the original intentions, at least in the eyes of critical observers (Braun 2014: 33–5). In January 2012, a group of German speaking stalwarts, along with *Schutztruppe* traditionalists, held what

¹⁸ *Evangelischer Gemeindekirchenrat zu Windhuk, 25 Jahre Christuskirche in Windhuk*, Windhoek 1935, as quoted in Hinz 2012: 368.

FIG. 1.2 Historical photograph showing the concentration camp in Windhoek in close proximity to the *Alte Feste*. Photograph: National Archives of Namibia, photo no. 02270.



FIG. 1.3 The Windhoek Rider at its original spot in front of the *Alte Feste*. Photograph: Andrea Sosio.



was technically an illegal service in the church building in connection with the centenary of the Rider Statue.

The Rider Statue itself has arguably been the most pivotal and also controversial among the components of the ‘city crown’ and warrants separate treatment (see ch. 6). Up to 2009, this statue was situated on the slope that rises up on the right hand side behind the *Christuskirche*, as one approaches there from the CBD. This slope is topped by the *Alte Feste*. This very prominent spot is now occupied by the Independence Memorial Museum, which with its proportions of some 40 m in height dwarfs the surrounding buildings. In its basically cubic form, the museum resonates with a number of representative office blocks that have gone up in the wider vicinity mainly to house government ministries and other state agencies. Along with the Supreme Court further down the slope, these new additions

changed the cityscape after independence. By early 2014, this effect was reinforced by the erection of high-rise buildings on the eastern side of Independence Avenue. Still, all this does not obliterate the strong German colonial imprint present in the city crown.

By moving the Rider some 150 m and re-installing it in front of the entrance to the *Alte Feste*, a new ensemble was created in 2009. At its new spot, the Rider faced the road not at a right angle from the *Alte Feste*, but at a narrower angle, broadly parallel to its former position. In this way, it pointed towards the *Christuskirche* and further towards the city at large, as before. In this way, although the Rider had lost its former dominant position, a clear reminder of history was maintained. That situation was terminated in a much debated surprise move during Christmas 2013, when the statue was cut from its pedestal and placed in the inner courtyard of the *Alte Feste*. It seems that one of the intended consequences was to keep it out of general public view and to relegate it to the position of an historical artefact.

The *Alte Feste* itself originated as a military installation, the main military stronghold of the colonial power in Windhoek. It is therefore not by accident that the former concentration camp was placed next to this citadel. Similar to other buildings intended for similar purposes, the best known being Fort Namutoni, the structure is styled on the ideas prevalent around 1900 of a medieval castle set under a southern sun and thus evocative to some extent of the medieval Crusades. Over and above its practical purpose, the fortification therefore carried clear romantic connotations which today may be helpful in attracting tourists.

Up to 2009, then, the colonial composition of what may be called the city crown had been left virtually untouched, and indeed, it had been largely unchanged during the 90 years of South African colonial rule. Both the *Christuskirche* and even more explicitly the Rider make direct reference to the Namibian War. In imagery as well as in the texts on the tablets the structures convey the views of the German colonial power of a hundred years ago. This strong colonial imprint is even more significant since this ensemble also marks the entrance to the precinct that houses the central institutions of Parliament and the Prime Minister's office.

Today, these buildings are slightly out of view, however.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the National Assembly occupies what still is called in popular parlance the *Tintenpalast* (Ink Palace), which was also built under German rule as the administrative centre of the colony. It was here, on top of Parliament Gardens, which stretch up from the *Christuskirche*, that modest additions commemorating aspects of the independence struggle were made before the erection of the Independence Memorial Museum. The most prominent among these additions are three modestly sized bronze statues placed beneath the main entrance to the National Assembly building (*Tintenpalast*). These statues represent Chief Hosea Kutako, *Kaptein* Hendrik Samuel Witbooi and Rev. Theofilus Hamutumbangela.²⁰ The statues have not brought any tangible change to the cityscape. The personages represented played important roles in the early stages of the independence movement and during the UN petitioning campaign of the 1950s and 1960s. As previously mentioned, Hosea Kutako was

¹⁹ Note however the images showing situations without the present-day trees that visually separated the Rider at its original spot from the *Tintenpalast* (Reiterdenkmal 2014: 40, 42, 46, 47).

²⁰ Dobler 2014: 104, fn. 65 provides biographical data on Hamutumbangela.

Fig. 1.4 Statue of Hosea Kutako seated in parliament gardens; note (lower left) the rifle depicted at his feet, and (lower right) logs and sticks from the holy fire. Photograph: Jill Kinahan.



at that time centre stage, with Hendrik Samuel Witbooi (grandson of Hendrik Witbooi who died in 1905 fighting German colonial forces) playing an important role in the south. Amongst the trio, Hamutumbangela represents the north (Emmett 1999: 279).

The relatively new trio of statues can be seen to underscore the unity and national coverage of the early independence movement. However, the group emerged from a somewhat embarrassing situation. The statue of Hosea Kutako, the only one shown seated, was commissioned first but it was covered in black plastic for over a year before it was joined by the two statues now standing on either side.

For years these statues remained the only visible reference in central Windhoek to the independence struggle, apart from a few fading murals quite out of general sight near police headquarters. This situation only changed fundamentally with the construction of the Independence Memorial Museum, more than twenty years after independence. As a building and by the message it conveys, this museum, opened on March 20, 2014, has now implanted a strong and assertive statement in the heart of the colonial ensemble of buildings and memory sites. This thrust is enhanced by the statue in front of the building of Founding President Sam Nujoma, holding up the Constitution of Namibia. The Nujoma statue is more or less on the same spot where the Rider Statue presenting his rifle originally stood. The second, rather ephemeral place of the Rider, is now occupied by a memorial for the genocide, with a quote of the phrase harking back to SWAPO's old hymn and modified in Namibia's national anthem (Melber 2014b: ch. 2): 'Their Blood Waters Our Freedom'.

Regardless of the controversy surrounding the removal of the Rider Statue (see ch. 6), and the aesthetic and historiographic merits of the museum and the new statues, Windhoek's memory landscape has been changed significantly in this way.

A fair number of smaller and less conspicuous memorials, all referring to the warfare of the colonisers or to other aspects of colonisation are to be found in central Windhoek. One such memorial is to Curt von François, dubbed 'Founder of Windhoek', and situated in



FIG. 1.5 Genocide Memorial. Photograph: Naitsikile Iizyenda.

front of the City Hall. Another is the *Bittereinder* memorial in Bismarck Street. At most, such memorials are occasionally contested or re-appropriated in subaltern ways. For example, the colloquially known 'Witbooi Memorial' in the Zoo Garden in reality refers to the German soldiers who died in the campaign against the Witbooi in the early 1890s, which was highlighted by the vicious and ignominious attack on Hornkranz of April 12, 1893. The 'honest' Baster auxiliaries are also mentioned, neatly separated from their equally dead masters. There is no reference to the sacrifice of the Nama fighters. Again, the memorial for the first northern campaign of the South African forces in 1917, which led to the occupation of the Kwanyama capital of Namakunde and the death of Mandume Ndemufayo, is situated in front of the railway station building, which dates back to German colonial times. This colonial war memorial has been re-appropriated by the popular notion of Mandume's head being buried there, turning it into the 'Mandume memorial' (Hillebrecht 2013; Timm 1998: 147). The Rider Statue also has been seen by Ovaherero as marking foremost the spot of the concentration camp and of the suffering of their forebears.²¹

Such informal re-appropriations obviously cannot change the main content and overall import of the monuments. With the important exception of the Independence Museum and surroundings, therefore, Windhoek memory landscape remains characterised by German colonial buildings and monuments that reference the Namibian War and underscore the colonial perspective on these events. At the same time, this emphasis provides a clearly skewed counterpoint to the staging of the liberation war presented by other memorials that have been erected in Windhoek, as well as at important sites in the north, such as Omugulu-gwombashe or Eenhana. As already observed, for two decades these efforts had no presence in central Windhoek. Amongst them, the rehabilitation of the cemetery of

21 Luther Zaire, Bahnhof Langendreer, Bochum, March 17, 2004, oral statement in personal communication, June 21, 2004.

FIG. 1.6 Independence Memorial Museum dominates the 'Crown' of Windhoek. Photograph: Jonathan West.



FIG. 1.7 The so-called Witbooi Memorial in Zoo Gardens, originally erected in memory of the German soldiers who died in the campaign against the Witbooi. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.



the Old Location should be mentioned. Plainly derelict at the time of independence, this important site struck a sad contrast to the lush and high trees in the 'white cemetery' just across the road.²² During the years after independence, the old cemetery was fenced in and an honorary grave erected to commemorate the victims of the shooting on December 10, 1959. A visit to the site requires special resolve and indeed a little specific knowledge and awareness, so its public impact is minimal. This situation may have contributed to the sudden activism in the run-up to the long-awaited opening of the Independence Memorial Museum in early 2014.

The triumphant image of the victors

As previously mentioned, the monumental Heroes' Acre has also been erected well out of general sight. Visible from the southern suburbs of Windhoek, it falls within the array of the Auas mountains and unfolds its momentous statement only upon close inspection. The structure underlines the liberation war, and more specifically, its exile and military dimensions.²³ Designed and built by a North Korean firm, Heroes' Acre celebrates the liberation struggle in monumental style, which corresponds to a military and heroic image of national liberation.²⁴ In this way, the structure underlines a specific image of Namibian history, which not only centres on the liberation struggle, but also highlights this struggle's dimension primarily as an armed conflict. This view can be considered the main point of reference of official, state-sponsored public memory in Namibia today. This hegemonic image of national history is represented in concentrated form by the bronze relief which forms one of the central features of the memorial site.

Set on a steep slope, the entire arrangement is overlooked by a giant obelisk, which stands at the apex of a huge triangular field that has been hewn into the slope. On the way there, visitors pass a gate where they have to pay entrance fees. They proceed to an extensive car park, and then further to a large fountain. Turning to their right, visitors ascend a gently rising broad pathway. At the end of this path, the triangular field of graves comes into view on the left, while a small amphitheatre opens to the right in front of the vista of Windhoek and surrounding mountains. This magnificent view is generally visible to those who ascend past the graves. The large flat space between the graves and the amphitheatre is dominated by a monumental rendering of the Namibian Order of Valour with an eternal flame at its

22 Personal observation, April 1991.

23 For further comment on this, and sentiments gleaned from conversations in Northern Namibia, see Becker 2011: 522–3. As Becker observes, the 'foundation myth' was linked to the policy of national reconciliation, also de-emphasising regional difference. For earlier versions of this narrative, giving more space to the Namibian War, see the perfunctory treatment in SWAPO 1981: 13–4 and the more extensive one in Katjavivi 1988: ch. 1. On shifts in emphasis, giving more room to 'diversity' in the image of national culture, see Akuupa & Korneš 2013.

24 Akawa 2014: 103–5; Hunter 2008a:158–60; Zeller 2004: 135–8; Melber 2002. Parallels to the earlier, similarly named, structure outside Harare are obvious, and many observations regarding Harare's Heroes' Acre also apply to that in Windhoek (see Werbner 1998). However, the Zimbabwean hierarchy of heroes and Heroes' Acres (Kriger 1995) has not been replicated in Namibia so far. It would, however, be worthwhile to investigate the background and imagery of North Korean constructed memorials in Africa.

centre. While there are obvious differences, uninitiated visitors with German backgrounds invariably recognise a similarity to the Iron Cross, the traditional Order of Valour for the Prussian and German armies up to 1945.²⁵

Before reaching the graves, the visitor passes a broad face of polished stone meant to receive the names of people who have contributed to the liberation struggle. Years after the opening of the site, the surface is completely blank. The graves themselves are arranged on terraces, each containing one row of graves with uniform grave stones mounted on the stone faces that mark the rise to the next terrace. Most of these graves remain unoccupied at present, while the top terrace contains symbolic graves to honour protagonists of the early anti-colonial struggle, such as Hendrik Witbooi, Samuel Maharero, Jacob Marengo or Mandume Ndemufayo. A number of the remaining graves have been occupied by important personages of the liberation struggle.

Ascending through this field of graves, the visitor reaches a further platform from which the obelisk rises. The visual centre is occupied by the colossal figure of a guerrilla fighter, positioned in front of the obelisk, clad in uniform and ready to throw a hand grenade. The figure's bearded face is strongly reminiscent of the Founding President of the Republic. The figure, styled in a way reminiscent of socialist realism, conveys dynamic movement and presents an imposing idea of the kind of heroism that is meant to be celebrated at this site.

Behind the obelisk, a pathway in the arc of about a third of a circle makes space for a high, upright rock surface which carries the bronze relief mentioned above. This frieze is obviously meant to convey the history of colonial oppression, of anti-colonial resistance and above all, of the liberation struggle in Namibia, as the triumphant apogee and main theme of the entire memorial site. Here, images referencing northern Namibia are prevalent. One scene shows a group of Africans being brutalised in a grove of palm-trees, not typical of the centres of settler agriculture. In spite of further historical references, the main emphasis is on the military aspects of the liberation struggle and more particularly, on its progress towards regular warfare carried out with sophisticated weaponry. These weapons, and the neatly uniformed soldiers who carry them, strongly evoke the idea of a regular army liberating the country by open, conventional warfare. The frieze's story culminates in a triumphal march to independence, with soldiers brandishing the flag of the independent republic, a flag that was created in this form only in the course of the constitutional deliberations of early 1990, shortly before attainment of independence.

The overall complex continues even further up the slope, culminating in a small pavilion that gives a grand view not only of Heroes' Acre but of Windhoek as well, as if the city were stretched out at the feet of the memorial site. The magnificent setting within a dramatic landscape and the impressive vistas it allows certainly are among the attractions of Heroes' Acre. However, apart from state functions such as national holidays and the funerals of recognised heroes and heroines, the area is a lonely place for most of the time. At 16:00 at

25 A good example is *TN*, 17.1.2014, email by Bernd Rügen on occasion of the demolition of the Rider statue, who in his very critical statement concerning the Rider, also bemoans the image of the Iron Cross at this spot.



Fig. 1.8 Heroes' Acre: view from the Namibian Order of Valour up the steps to the giant obelisk. Photograph: Peter Hedebo.

the latest, when the gate is closed, the baboons take over and supposedly have all but erased the dedication in Sam Nujoma's gilded handwriting just beneath the giant warrior statue – by sliding down the polished stone face!

A recurrent controversy revolves around the question of who should be considered a hero or heroine worthy to be buried in Heroes' Acre. So far, these decisions have been taken by Cabinet, and the honour has been reserved for loyal SWAPO members. However, the decisions have not been accepted in each case. Thus, Hendrik Witbooi, the great-grandson of the national hero who emerged as a pivotal SWAPO figure in the south from the mid-1970s and served as SWAPO Vice President, Cabinet Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, has been buried in 2009 in his native Gibeon.

What is represented in Heroes' Acre can be read in two ways: in one, we are shown the image of a nation in arms, unified against its oppressors, seemingly without internal



Fig. 1.9 Heroes' Acre: View from the top, showing the statue of the Unknown Soldier. Photograph: Christo Doherty.

contradictions and with little reference to non-military dimensions of resistance. Another possible reading is that of an army returning from exile and ending colonial oppression by and large by externally-led action. Of course, both readings can easily coexist. They both assert a view of the liberation struggle as essentially a military affair, and at the same time refer to a homogeneous nation, thus papering over real divergences that go beyond the cleavage between the indigenous majority and former settlers, and form the main topic of official reconciliation discourse (du Pisani 2003). Indeed, such narratives may be seen as a normative statement, visualising the idea of a united nation that does not allow dissent (du Pisani 2010). In other words, 'dissidents and critics are seen as traitors' (Hunter 2010: 414). From a different, yet complementary perspective, this conception of a homogeneous nation also obliterates not only existing, deepening social rifts, but also important aspects of the liberation struggle connected in particular with the workers' movement (Jauch 2014), and also with an array of civil society activism and social movements (see also *supra*). The imagery presented by Heroes' Acre asserts specific emphases which provide insights into Swapo's political agenda, depicted through visuals of history and the design of a central memory site.

The approach has by and large been reaffirmed by the Independence Memorial Museum opened on March 20, 2014. Like Heroes' Acre, this museum was styled, planned and executed by North Korean contractors (see ch. 9).

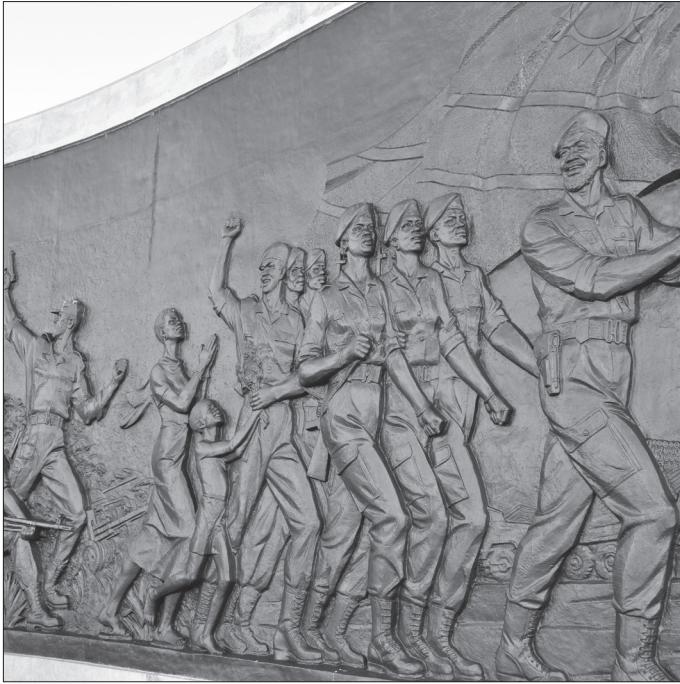


FIG. 1.10 Heroes' Acre. Detail of victory frieze behind the obelisk. Image obtained from website Flickr, and reproduced without changes. Photograph: Raymond June, copyright <https://creativecommons.org/>.

The triumphant images found in these memory sites clearly embody emphatically the vision of victors who lay claim, in Walter Benjamin's words, to the heritage 'of all who have ever prevailed before' (Benjamin 1980: 696–7). However, in so doing they deny the existence of social contradictions, including the social realignments that have occurred after independence with the rise of a black elite (Winterfeld 2010, and *supra*). By such silent denial, these winners of the entire process also acknowledge symbolically their cross-over to the side of domination.²⁶

The promise of the armed liberation struggle as a radical negation of colonialism once contained the hope of breaking up this reproduction of social and, along with it, symbolic domination. Frantz Fanon's advocacy of such radical upheaval was in fact predicated on, and linked to, his clairvoyant diagnosis of a dilemma: the reproduction of dominance in a new guise rather than its abrogation (Fanon 1968: 146–81). In social reality, relations of power and domination, centred on the colonial state, have been reconstituted in postcolonial guise in most of Africa and in the postcolonial world beyond (Davidson 1992). Under such circumstances, the constant reaffirmation of victors, cast in the roles of conquerors and dominators, which Benjamin had identified on a very general level, is evident also in a place like Heroes' Acre.

²⁶ Obviously, this does not preclude the legitimisation of existing postcolonial power relations by this imagery (Melber 2014b: 143–4, 150).

There are some important modifications, since it is not always easy to identify clearly who the 'victors' and the 'vanquished' are. This is especially true given the persistence of privilege and of gross inequality, or the plight of many veterans of the liberation war. If in Fanon's analysis, a mere change in the skin colour of those who dominate was envisaged, in Namibia, issuing from the historical compromise of 1989, the continuity of social dominance is premised on a continuity of privilege, with chances of upward mobility and co-option for a very limited group. These opportunities are closely related to the significant change in the make-up of the representative political centre.

The consequences for public mnemoscope are far-reaching and go well beyond the images of Heroes' Acre. Discrepancies between the official image of the past and the historical record alive in various regions and communities, have become evident on various occasions.²⁷ However, efforts to accommodate diverse regional experiences in the overall official narrative run into difficulties. An interesting example was provided by the Independence Day celebrations on 21 March 2012:²⁸ Since 1995, these celebrations have been designed to enhance the slogan 'unity in diversity' and to project specific cultural traits of the regions. The place for the main event where the President and the Cabinet are present, rotates around Namibia's fourteen regions. In 2012, Hardap Region and its capital, Marienfeld, were due to host the event. In the eyes of some locals, the occasion was overshadowed by the intention to launch a new series of bank notes during the event. This involved replacing the image of Hendrik Witbooi, featured on all bank notes since the inception of the Namibia Dollar in 1993, with that of Founding President Sam Nujoma, on the N\$ 10 and N\$ 20 denominations. Critics saw this as an act of robbing the south in general. Hendrik Witbooi had been the *Kaptein* of the !Khowesen group, so they in particular felt robbed of an important element of dignity and historical recognition.²⁹ Some !Khowesen, including the Acting *Kaptein*, therefore did not attend the event, which however still featured some of the typical riders with their hats covered in the white cloth, their ethnic marker.

The festival programme included a special speech by Stephanus Goliath, *Onderkaptein* of Berseba since 2011 and an exponent of SWAPO's struggle in the south in the 1970s and 1980s. After independence, he had served as governor of the !Kharas Region for several years. Stephanus Goliath recounted some significant turning points that underlined the contribution of the region to the liberation struggle. The significant feature was that, besides this effort to do justice to the concerns of the south in some way, there was no reference to these issues in the speeches by the representatives of the central state. In particular the speeches of President Pohamba and his predecessor, Nujoma, who gave an acceptance speech to acknowledge the honour of being pictured on the bank notes, made no reference to contributions of the south. Thus, the hegemonic narrative was not changed by the attempt to have countervailing historical facts and experiences acknowledged. These were relegated

27 See Prologue to ch. 9.

28 I followed the celebrations on NBC; for essential background, also on the general design of the celebrations, see Akuupa 2015.

29 Informal talks in Windhoek, February and March, 2012.

to a separate slot in the programme and thus kept disconnected from the master narrative. At the same time, these features re-affirmed respect for 'diversity' under the overarching quest for 'unity' (Akuupa & Kornes 2013). As we shall see (ch. 12), such efforts are not without inherent contradictions and volatile potential.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND PUBLIC MEMORY UNDER CONDITIONS OF EXTREME INEQUALITY

The hegemonic image of the liberation struggle as a war, in the specific sense of the military campaign represented at Heroes' Acre, conceals from view the broad social character of anti-colonial struggle and its shifting regional emphasis. This perspective also highlights the importance of non-state initiatives laying claim to making their own contributions towards the forging of public memory. Such initiatives emanate from civil society in a broad sense.³⁰ With reference to social conditions in Namibia, civil society formations engaged foremost in the making of public history and memory politics encompass in particular traditional communities, church bodies, advocacy groups, and cultural groups and organisations.

This inconclusive list of groups already demonstrates the great diversity and unevenness of civil society actors. Such unevenness pertains, in particular, to the ability of such actors to make their voices heard and the extent to which they actually do raise their voices. However, to what extent their messages and claims are legitimate, is quite a different issue. The public presence of alternative historical discourses hinges on the ways they are projected and not least on the material means at the disposal of their proponents to do so within and beyond their constituent communities. In other words, communities are limited in the way they can express alternative narratives of anti-colonial resistance. Political power as well as economic might obviously create good preconditions for such expressions.

Incumbent governments control the festival calendar; they ordain public memory events and designate public holidays, which in Namibia tend to be related to the liberation movement, besides religious events and more globally accepted dates such as May 1. The list is indicative: Independence Day on March 21, Cassinga Day on May 4,³¹ Heroes Day on August 26³² and Namibian Women's Day on December 10.³³ Government on various levels can set the agenda in other ways as well, by commissioning and approving school curricula and books, by ordaining museums and overseeing their presentations, by erecting – and taking down – memorials, by (re-)naming streets and cities, to name just a few. Powerful as

30 For present purposes, I follow the largely Gramscian concept of civil society as set out in Kössler & Melber 1993: ch.3.

31 To commemorate the South African attack on the SWAPO camp of Cassinga in southern Angola on May 4, 1978.

32 Refers to the first official military encounter in the Liberation War at Omugulu-gwombashe on August 26, 1966.

33 Refers to the shooting in the Old Location on December 10, 1959 and coincides with UN Human Rights Day. On public holidays in Namibia, see also Hunter 2008a: 161–4.

such departures may be, they seldom remain unchallenged. The success of such challenges generally depends not only – and not always – on sound and persuasive argument, but frequently even more on the means a group have at their disposal to broadcast their views and also to communicate amongst themselves. For this, education and material means are of importance, even though these by no means guarantee success, nor are poor people with little education condemned to utter ineffectiveness. Present-day Namibia provides examples to corroborate both these statements.

Nevertheless, inequality in resource endowment has direct consequences for the forms and ways in which public memory is enacted and negotiated. I demonstrate this with reference to the experiences of the commemorative year of 2004 in Namibia, when various initiatives tried to address the centenary of the genocide. However, first I would like to recall a few basic facts about social structure in Namibia, in particular as they refer to the problems and potentials of making oneself heard.

According to recent studies, Namibia has the highest Gini index in southern Africa by far. This also implies, lamentably, a top position worldwide. For 2011, the Gini index was reported as .74.³⁴ This figure puts Namibia in the top global position for economic inequality. In spite of vacillations, the position has not changed substantially over the years since independence. One government report actually speaks of a ‘deterioration of human development’ (RoN 2008: 29). After a mild drop during the mid-2000s, the indicators for inequality rose yet again.³⁵ Figures for 2012 and 2014 put the Gini index at slightly over or below .6 while others mention an index of more than .7.³⁶ This Gini index rating accounts for the contradiction that Namibia, being ranked as an upper middle income country on account of gross economic indicators, still faces severe issues of poverty. The extent of inequality is also expressed by a high polarisation of income figures (RoN 2008: 91), and by a prevalence of poverty among well over 50 percent of the population, in spite of Namibia’s status as an upper middle income country.³⁷

34 Jauch & Kaapama 2011: 3; for a similar figure for 2013, see <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2172.html> (14.2.2014); the lower figures given elsewhere, partly just below .6, do not change the basic picture, even though they are linked with claims of reduction of poverty (Sherbourne 2013: 89–98). For present purposes, the basic conclusion regarding gross inequality is sufficient, and it is superfluous to engage the validity of various figures given in any way (see also the figures assembled by Melber 2014b: 145–8; Töttemeyer 2013: 43–4). The Gini index measures income differentials of the two extreme population quintiles in relation to average income. A Gini index of 0.0 would mean absolute equality; figures between .2 and .35 show relatively even income relationships. My argument is built on existing figures arrived at by diverse methods. Even though there is some variation and contest about validity, the basic finding of gross inequality remains uncontested. For an earlier version of this argument, see Kössler 2005b: 65–8.

35 See further, <http://data.worldbank.org/en/country/namibia> (17.2.2014); http://www.indexmundi.com/namibia/economy_profile.html (17.2.2014).

36 See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-3-inequality-adjusted-human-development-index>; http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Namibia/Wirtschaft_node.html; <http://www.laenderdaten.de/wirtschaft/gini-index.asp>, based on CIA World Factbook Distribution of Family income – GINI – Index; CIA data status as of 14.01.2013 (websites accessed 24.6.2015).

37 http://www.indexmundi.com/namibia/economy_profile.html (17.2.2014); <http://www.indexmundi.com/namibia/income-inequality.html> (17.2.2014).

TABLE 1. Namibia: Human Development Index (HDI)

	2007	2009	2011	2012	2013
HDI	0.686	0.606	0.625	0.608	0.624
Rank	128	105	120	128	127
GNP per capita rank minus HDI rank	-23	-14	-21		
Poverty adjusted HDI				0.344	0.352
Percentage loss against HDI %				43.5	43.6
Loss in rank against HDI				-16	-22

Source: Human Development Report, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014.

A clearer picture can be gained from the Human Development Index (HDI), which reflects health and educational standards besides income. Here, Namibia consistently occupies a medium position. Earlier reports show a tellingly large difference between its HDI rank and its rank according to per capita income (see Table 1.1). Since 2013, the Human Development Reports give an inequality adjusted HDI. Seen from this angle, Namibia slips dramatically, sustaining the highest loss in rank of all countries worldwide. Moreover, while figures had improved for Namibia for 2009, they have once again deteriorated according to later reports. For our purposes, further insight is gained from more detailed data broken down by regions as well as by language groups.³⁸

There are considerable differences concerning inequality across the regions. Thus, average household incomes vary widely, and regions with higher average incomes also tend to be more unequal than those with lower averages. Inequality is more pronounced in the central and southern regions that were affected by settler colonialism (Ekström 2003: 39). Thus in Khomas, which includes the capital city of Windhoek, the average household received N\$ 47,409 in 1996, compared with N\$ 6,439 for Ohangwena (Schade 2000: 117). More detailed figures add to the picture (see Table 1.2). As Ekström (2003: 3) noted based on 1993/4 figures, 'it is primarily the central/southern region that suffers from a skewed distribution of income'.

The data on the situation of language groups confirms this picture and adds important detail (see Table 1.3). The distribution by language groups gives a steeply stratified picture. This data points to the pivotal role of language group when it comes to determining the pattern of inequality. First, inequality within language groups is below the national average of inequality throughout, and particularly low among the most affluent groups, specifically amongst German speakers. Taken as a separate group, they were at a level of inequality which is comparable to that of the European Union and only slightly higher than that of

³⁸ The following figures are taken from Levine 2007 for 2001–4 and from NHDR (2000/01) for earlier years. Even though available data thus broken down to suitable categories is dated, it shows the main persistent structures, and the more recent data like the HDI just quoted corroborate the persistence of gross inequality.

TABLE 2 Namibia: HDI, Gini index and incidence of poverty in selected regions

Region	HDI 2000 ¹	HDI 2001–04 ²	Gini index 2003–04 ³	Poverty incidence 2003/04 ⁵ poor/ severely poor (%)
Namibia	0.648	0.557	0.635 ⁴	27.6/13.8
Caprivi (now Zambezi)	0.517	0.421	0.47	28.6/12.5
Erongo	0.587	0.705	0.57	10.3/ 4.8
Hardap	0.668	0.572	0.69	32.1/21.9
!Kharas	0.701	0.664	0.61	21.9/12.5
!Khomas	0.769	0.732	0.57	6.3/ 2.4
Kunene	0.589	0.504	0.51	23.0/13.1
Ohangwena	0.544	0.403	0.45	44.7/19.3
Omaheke	0.607	0.627	0.64	30.1/17.5
Otjozondjupa	0.602	0.638	0.60	27.8/15.8

Sources: 1 NHDR 2000/01: 169; 2 Levine 2007; 3 RoN 2008: 36; 4 More recent overall figures put the Gini index significantly higher (see text); 5 RoN 2008: 10

TABLE 3 Namibia: HDI and incidence of poverty by selected language group

Language group	HDI 2000 ¹	HDI 2001–04 ²	Gini index 2003/04 ³	Poverty incidence 2003/04 ⁴ poor/ severely poor (%)
Namibia (all language groups)	0.648	0.557	0.635 ⁵	27.6/13.8
San	0.348	0.359	0.44	59.7/39.0
Khoekhoegowab	0.626	0.526	0.52	34.2/21.4
Oshiwambo	0.647	0.546	0.52	28.5/11.8
Otjiherero	0.684	0.610	0.53	17.0/ 8.8
Afrikaans	0.855	0.741	0.56	7.9/ 3.5
English	0.931	0.818	0.41	0.6/ 0.4
German	1.000	0.938	0.31	0.0/ 0.0

Sources: 1 NHDR 2000/01: 169; 2 Levine 2007; 3 RoN 2008:36; 4 RoN 2008: 13; 5 More recent overall figures put the Gini index significantly higher (see text).

Germany.³⁹ However, German speakers enjoyed the highest HDI by far of all the language groups in Namibia. In 2000, their HDI was given as 1.0, the highest possible score; figures for the period of 2001 to 2004 showed only an insignificant decline. What is more, the next two groups, English and Afrikaans speakers, followed at a clear distance, and the gap widened later. For these groups, figures stood at 0.931 and 0.855 respectively in 2000, and dropped to 0.818 and 0.741 in 2001–4.

39 http://www.laenderdaten.de/wirtschaft/gini_index.aspx; <http://www.amtliche-sozialberichterstattung.de/Tabellen/tabelleA3.html> (17.2.2014), giving the Gini index for Germany as .27 and .29 respectively.

The figures referring to language group indicate an extent of inequality which is not captured even by the extremely high rating on the Gini index: Considering that this index refers to the highest income quintile, some 20,000 German speakers, or less, would account for just five percent of this upper fifth within an overall population of some 2.0 million. Given the low internal inequality within this group, it is highly likely that in their overwhelming majority, German speakers belong to this highest income group.⁴⁰ In any case, the gradient is much steeper than indicated by the Gini index, high as it may be by itself.

Conditions at the top differ starkly from those at the bottom: For Oshiwambo speakers, Otjiherero and Khoekhoegowab speakers, HDI figures were clearly below those for the top three groups and with the exception of Otjiherero speakers, also below the Namibian average; San were clearly way at the bottom of the range. Specifically Khoekhoegowab speakers live largely in regions which show high HDI figures. In both ǀKharas and Hardap regions, HDI was clearly above the national average. However, the same applies to the regional Gini indices, which is a clear pointer to the specific plight of Khoekhoegowab speakers in the region. For ǀKharas, the index stood at .701 in 2000 and at .664 in 2001–04, and for Hardap at .668 and .572 respectively, and both were clearly above the national average given as .648 in 2000 and .557 in 2001–04. Amongst the regions where many Otjiherero speakers live HDI increased in Erongo, Otjozondjupa and Omaheke, again with particularly stark inequality in the latter two regions. In Erongo, the larger weight of cities and formal wage labour may have played a role, while Kunene resembles other northern regions, largely outside the pale of settler agriculture. Overall, available data strongly suggest that members of resident traditional communities are clearly underprivileged in terms of material resources at their disposal.

The situation is thrown into stark relief by international comparisons. Thus, in terms of HDI, German speaking Namibians in 2007 were at a par with Canada or Sweden, while Namibia at large was comparable to the level of Human Development observed in India, Morocco or South Africa. Khoekhoegowab speakers came in roughly at the level of Papua New Guinea, Sudan or Congo (or the northern regions in Namibia).⁴¹ All this confirms that the former Police Zone remains shaped by the imprint of settler colonialism. This concerns not only socio-economic inequality, but also the power relations that inevitably go with it, such as dependence on wage labour on commercial farms and its consequences, or high prevalence of informal occupations and unemployment.

Gross socio-economic inequality carries important consequences for memory processes and initiatives by civil society actors. These concern, in particular, available resources of various kinds. Such resources comprise not just tangible material means such as reading matter and internet access or means of transportation, and other implements that are necessary to ensure easy and continuous communication.

Another dimension concerns widely divergent standards of education, at least that of average group members. One should also consider time, which forms a vital dimension in

40 At any rate, poverty prevalence amongst German speakers is drastically less than the figures even for the most affluent region (17,9%); see also Schade 2004.

41 Figures adapted from Levine 2007: 14, 16, 19, 20.

this respect. Disposable time is essential if people are to initiate activities in the public realm. It is also indispensable for deliberations needed to ascertain the image of the past which any given group wishes to project, as well as for the search for ways and means they have at their disposal to do so. A similar argument can be made for disposable life energy. Therefore, unemployment figures projected at close to 30 and even more than 50 percent,⁴² not only tell about socioeconomic crisis as a persistent and pervasive feature of social reality, but also point to the personal predicament of underprivileged people who face grave difficulties finding the mental resources and physical strength to pursue memory activities, even though they may consider them important. Such deliberation and project making is inextricably linked to the existence of various formal as well as informal social networks that must be upheld or reproduced to remain intact and functioning. In these ways, images and conceptions of the past are kept alive and reproduced, and actually defined or re-constructed by various actor groups. These diverse groups differ greatly in terms of the means they can muster to project their versions of the past and the concerns that are linked to them onto a wider public. This also implies grave differences in the forms adopted by various actor groups.

To put this into perspective, it may suffice to recount a few basic facts and circumstances. While the German language is not unimportant in Namibia, German speakers form a tiny, but very affluent minority, as we have seen. This puts them in a position to support means of mass communication quite out of proportion to their numbers. Among these, the most conspicuous is the self-advertised, oldest Namibian newspaper, *Allgemeine Zeitung* (AZ), a daily published under the umbrella of Namibian Media Holdings, but with an editorial line that sets it off quite clearly from the other dailies published by the group, *Republikein* and *Namibian Sun*. Routinely, the AZ devotes considerable space to issues of memory politics, mainly centred on efforts that may be summed up as the Namibian connection in denialism with respect to the genocide (Kössler & Melber 2012; see ch. 5). The paper, priced markedly above English language dailies, caters to the interests of German tourists besides locals. Arguably, in the Namibian context it has only limited impact on public opinion at large on account of the existing language barrier. At the same time, the AZ may be considered the only ethnic newspaper in the country, since its audience is restricted largely to the German speaking community. In contradistinction to this, the papers published mainly in English (with some sections in African languages) use the official language and appeal to the public at large, while *Republikein* resonates with the great numbers in the south and centre that use Afrikaans as a lingua franca. In this way, the AZ functions largely as an internal means of communication for the German speaking community, re-asserting and re-enforcing views that contribute to the peculiar position of this group, in some ways at the margins of Namibian society when it comes to joining national concerns but highly aloof also from a supposedly westernised Germany (see also Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 290–5). At the same time, the transnational public

42 http://www.indexmundi.com/namibia/economy_profile.html (17.2.2014); NE, 28.9.2010; the figures are questioned in NE, 11.11.2011; but see <http://ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=35256> for discussion; these figures refer to 2008. African Development Bank 2009: vii mentions a rate of 36.7%. A study cited in NE, 8.6.2012 puts the figure at 28.4 percent. The methodological issues cannot be addressed here, but the scale and pervasiveness of the problem are obvious.

impact of the AZ should not be underestimated. It runs an effective website and receives a constant flow of letters to the editor, to a considerable extent from outside Namibia.

The tendency towards self-referential, internal communication processes is reinforced by the existence of a German language programme on NBC, the national broadcaster, and above all, by a host of civil society bodies organised and kept alive by community members.⁴³ These comprise bodies such as the long-standing school associations that for decades have proved instrumental in the drive to maintain a German language school system comprising full secondary school education. This system, which remains at least partly separate from mainstream education even today, and is sustained also by official German foreign cultural activities mainly run by and around the Goethe Centre, in effect serves to maintain ethnic boundary maintenance. The same is true of the specifically German language Lutheran Church (DELK), again unique in Namibia by explicit reference to a specific language community (Braun 2014). In the field of memory politics and practice, an amazing range of local museums is also kept alive largely on the initiative of German speakers (Wessler 2007: ch.4). Scientific societies in Windhoek and Swakopmund, along with publishing ventures that make an impact in Namibia, are disproportionately run and controlled by German speakers.

All this speaks to a thick web of activities and institutions amongst German speakers that may be considered an important form of civil society. However, it is questionable whether one should consider these structures as expressions of civic commitment, since they are clearly restricted to the purview of one ethnic group. In this way, these institutions serve foremost to reproduce and safeguard ethnic privilege and effectively contribute towards boundary maintenance in this context. All of this is predicated on available resources, including not just material means but also disposable free time and energy, as well as knowledge and education. In all these respects, German speakers are privileged for structural reasons, not least because the Apartheid system privileged whites with more high quality schooling than everybody else, leading to a systematic dearth of qualifications amongst black Namibians.⁴⁴

Those groups who were subjected to the flipside of privilege under colonialism and Apartheid still find themselves in subaltern⁴⁵ positions today when it comes to means of public articulation and projecting knowledge, in particular views on the past. While it is true that NBC also provides services in Otjiherero and Khoekhoegowab, and these provide important means of intra-communal communication across the country, in other ways relevant groups remain clearly underprivileged. This is reflected in their memory practices. Ovaherero and Nama remain largely dependent on oral means of transmitting memory content, which is ascertained by oral traditions that have been maintained and reproduced by

43 Research on the situation of civil society in Namibia, conducted in April 2014, corroborated the impression that bodies where in particular German speakers prevail enjoy tremendous advantages in terms of finance. While these draw on endowments and membership fees, civil society actors generally are dependent on outside donors. See also the annual report by the German Cultural Council (*Deutscher Kulturrat*) as summarised in AZ, 7.11.2014.

44 Melber 1979; Cohen 1994; the means of communication available to German speakers are treated more extensively in ch. 2.

45 On this notion, with particular reference to history and memory practices in southern Africa, see Lalu 2009.

oral transmission and performance through the generations (Biwa 2010, 2012; Alnaes 1989: ch. 8). In comparison to other instances from southern Africa (Hofmeyr 1994), it seems, however, that the rise of electronic media has not impinged on these forms of communication and transmission of memory content. However, the African language services of NBC do play an important role in such transmission. Significantly, all such practices and endeavours are far removed from historical research, even where it may appear sympathetic to actors' causes. This is brought out graphically by the instance of a unique, self-styled exhibition on occasion of the centenary of the colonial genocide in 2004.

This exhibition was staged during the run-up to the centennial commemoration of the battle at Ohamakari in August 2004. It was sited at the Herero Commando building in Katutura.⁴⁶ The exhibition was the result of the personal initiative of a member of the Ovaherero Genocide Committee. In the beginning, the idea was not endorsed by the group, and at first a call over the Otjiherero radio for people to make available potential exhibits went completely unheeded. Initially, therefore, the exhibition was stocked mainly with items in the personal possession of the organiser. This changed once the show became a reality and started to evince lively interest. Then additional items were brought forward and placed in the exhibition, which also changed its complexion in the process. Exhibits included a central section of photo documents which traced the 1904 war, the genocide and the sufferings in the concentration camps. Here, the contrasting proclamations of Samuel Maharero, calling for sparing women, children, missionaries etc. on the one hand, and Trotha, decreeing the wholesale elimination of Ovaherero from GSWA, were included. Salient leading figures, such as Samuel Maharero, but also Governor Leutwein and General von Trotha, were represented by portraits and commentary.

This central section was preceded by an extensive documentation of Ovaherero history since the group's entry into present day Namibia. German colonial rule was similarly represented. This part of the exhibition was based on weekend supplements of the *Die Suidwester* newspaper from the 1980s, which were hoisted on exhibition boards. In another section, Herero Paramount Chiefs, starting with Samuel Maharero, followed by Hosea Kutako and Clemens Kapuuo down to the incumbent, the late Kuaimea Riruako, were represented in a continuous line of images and plaster busts. Several copies of a poster put out by the National Archives of Namibia were in the background. This poster showed Ovaherero prisoners of war in chains and called on people to make available to the archives all kinds of memory items on anti-colonial resistance. In the course of the centennial events in 2004, the poster became emblematic of the genocide, also being displayed on cars and at public venues. In the exhibition, the mentioned items were supplemented by objects that had been brought by interested members of the public, such as calabashes, milk churns, old-style pressing irons, tripods and cooking utensils. Characteristically, some of these items are still in use today, even though they conveyed images of a life before the advent of electricity, thus harking back to a fairly recent past, at least as far as life in town is concerned. After the

46 Thanks to the organiser, Usiel Kandjii, for extensive discussions during the finalisation of the exhibition and on later occasions, and for the cooperation of Larissa Förster during participant observation.

opening of the exhibition, on August 6, 2004, the following Saturday was used for extensive and well-attended speeches and oral historical accounts. Eventually, a somewhat abridged version of the exhibition was again on display one year later, during Herero Day at Okahandja in 2005. Put on with very simple means, this exhibition attests to personal initiative and innovation in the context of a memory politics that originally had not envisaged such features at all. The exhibition also speaks to a range of concerns, foremost amongst them an identity politics based on historical legitimacy that is documented here by reference to Ovaherero history in pre-colonial Namibia and also by the line of successive paramount chiefs. Yet the exhibition also underlines the difficulties involved in carrying through such initiatives from a subaltern position. Clearly, it is not the case here that the subaltern 'cannot speak' (Spivak 1988). Still, the potentials for articulating and projecting concerns remain severely limited when it comes to reaching a wider public. These difficulties also come to the fore when considering that the exhibition falls back on newspaper supplements that obviously had been carefully preserved for many years.

At the same time, committed and educated Ovaherero seemed quite unaware of recent academic work on specifically Ovaherero history and resilience in connection with the genocide,⁴⁷ and this was reflected in the kinds of exhibits. Such circumstances also point to deficiencies and communication gaps in sharing scholarly work with concerned communities. Information barriers relate to habitual distance of people like the initiator of the exhibition and his closer social contexts from spheres of more formalised knowledge, as transacted in academic publications and debate. This is in stark contrast to the apparent ease and self-assurance displayed by representatives of 'revisionist' positions among German speaking Namibians when they feel the need to argue in public, albeit on highly shaky factual grounds (see ch. 5). Critical scholars face the responsibility for cooperating more than they have in the past with such grassroots initiatives as represented by the exhibition in Katutura.

A NATIONAL NEXUS IN A FRAGMENTED FRAMEWORK

In closing, I address the clear perception that all the variegated concerns outlined still have referred to Namibia for a long time, having changed their reference from 'South West Africa' (even though in some quarters with recalcitrance and delay). One explanation refers to exigencies people experience in their everyday social life. The national nexus was imposed by colonial fiat, and by this, apparently acquired a measure of 'base legitimacy' (*Basislegitimität*) grounded in the very existence of a state as the ensemble of the powers that be. It is the state which effectively wields power and thereby provides 'evident' claim to rule (Trotha 2000: 260). 'The internalised recognition of an order of power by the oppressed and underprivileged itself is a *process of power*, a process of safeguarding and "deepening" of

⁴⁷ Uziel Kandjii, Interview, Windhoek 6.9.2004; consider important contributions such as Krüger 1999 (significantly in German), Gewalt 1999, and Förster 2010 (also in German).

power relations' (Popitz 1992: 222). Specifically with respect to the colonial situation, this has been linked to the provision of basic infrastructure as well as to the imposition of 'the conqueror's social and cultural ordering power' (Trotha 1994a: 74). That power conveyed to the imposed order – the state, its boundaries and territory – a sense of routinisation and apparent self-evidence. Such 'base legitimacy' also referred to the borders of colonial territories and eventually, independent states.

Such normative power of facticity has also found its expression in the frame of reference taken by *national* liberation movements in Namibia as well as elsewhere in Africa and other parts of the world. However, this does not yet answer the central question about the 'narration' (Bhabha 1990) that bolsters such legitimacy in the long run. Recent treatments of political theory see precisely at this point lacunae in theories of social contract that need to be filled by accounts that convey a sense of belonging (König 2008: 368–73). In terms of conceptions of the past, such accounts themselves are a field of contention and are shaped by negotiation. The narrations bring legitimacy to claims about specific contributions by individuals as well as regionally or ethnically defined groups. This is graphically expressed in the recognition of 'national heroes', but also in the raising and accommodation of material claims such as has occurred for some years in Namibia in the case of war veterans.

Significantly, such claims have motivated important revisions in the officially propagated image of the past. Thus, under the impression of newly arising claims, Founding President Sam Nujoma pointed to the struggles and contributions of those who had remained in the country in addition to the externally driven armed struggle which had been privileged so far (TN 31.7. 2006). Another instance involves the concerns and claims of representatives of affected groups, descendants of survivors of the genocide, dealt with extensively in Part III of this book.

Thus, the image of a nation's past is not only a contested terrain; this image is also not fixed and is subject to changes and transformations. There are no ways to imagine it otherwise. However the terrain, as well as the contest over it, is crucial: 'A common reference to the past is decisive for the constitution of political systems' to 'justify their very existence' (König 2008: 14, 43). Moreover, independence in Namibia, which was also tantamount to the overcoming of Apartheid at least in formal legal terms, implied much more than political transition. It amounted to (re-)founding the nation. This means newly assessing the nation's trajectory, and thus involves an implicit call for a thorough review of its history (Bundy 2007). The working out of such a trajectory is above all the task and concern of those directly affected, in our case, Namibians. For this reason, it lies to a large extent beyond what this book can do. However, an analysis such as the present one may contribute toward such a process of self-identification by tracing and mapping some of its prerequisites. In the Namibian case, the postcolonial relationship that exists with Germany is of major importance in this respect, and to this topic the following chapter is addressed.

2

Germany: From Late Coloniser to First Postcolonial Nation to Postcolonial Amnesia¹

ONE OF THE BASIC GIVENS IN MEMORY POLITICS BETWEEN NAMIBIA AND GERMANY IS THE stark contrast between the amount of attention accorded to Germany in Namibia and conversely, to Namibia in the German public realm. While the former is lively and reflected in an almost continual presence in the media, the latter appears scant in comparison. For most Germans, Namibia figures, if at all, as a tourist destination or to provide scenery for trashy soap operas on TV. Namibia does not register as the site of a genocide for which Germans were responsible, nor of struggles to overcome its consequences. One might cite a number of reasons for this disparity, such as the grossly different population sizes and economic weight or the German focus on Europe and the North Atlantic. In themselves, such orientations are part of the postcolonial situation. The postcolonial presence that is significant in other European countries which have a past as colonial powers is virtually absent in Germany. This means that actor groups who make themselves heard in France or the Netherlands, are mostly absent in Germany (Lutz & Gawarecki 2005), contributing towards a general amnesia about Germany's colonial past.

One glaring example is as follows: At a meeting on the African Renaissance initiative in Berlin on April 4, 2001, the Green Bundestag Deputy Hans-Christian Ströbele, generally known for his critical and left-leaning views, in his capacity as his party's leader in the Bundestag committee for development cooperation, remarked that 'Germany has been driven out of colonialisation early on. . . . Germany can now act in an unencumbered way and assume the role of avant-garde' in Africa (as quoted from Kössler & Melber 2004:

1 The first three sections build on an earlier version now published in Kössler 2014d.

37). This remark highlights the extremely marginal role which the German colonial past has played during recent decades, certainly in the public mind in (West) Germany.² The episode also shows that colonial amnesia was (and remains) widespread even amongst generally informed and critical sections of the German public. It can be noted that both German national identity and the history of the German nation state have been deeply intertwined with colonial fantasies and ventures (Ames et al. 2005; Kundrus 2003b; Friedrichsmeyer et al. 1998). Yet at the same time, it is quite likely that the idea that 'Germany once was an imperialist country', may 'appear almost out of the way to Germans today' (van Laak 2005: 9).

Given the historical record, this amounts to postcolonial amnesia. In this chapter, I hope to explore some of the reasons for such amnesia which impact strongly on present-day efforts to raise awareness about the Namibian predicament and work towards reconciliation. This account will inevitably be linked to a brief rehearsal of the German colonial experience and its reflection in the public mind. In this way, we shall also see that amnesia has not always been the dominant mode of relating to the German colonial past.

THE TIMES AND SCOPE OF GERMAN COLONIALISM

Germany was a latecomer – both as a region of industrial development and as a national state. For more than half a century after the Vienna Congress of 1815, the German national movement clamoured for unification of the German lands, famously fragmented 'under the care of 34 monarchs' (Heinrich Heine, *Michel nach dem März*) into one, possibly republican, state; this was linked to a programme of industrialisation, a strategy to catch up with Britain, the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, the canonical conception of late development even today stems from an effort to conceptualise an appropriate strategy to make Germany into a viable, industrialised nation state. To the relevant writers at the time, it was a foregone conclusion that such a state would be complete only if it had colonies and could muster sea power. Colonies were envisaged as areas for emigration, as suppliers of raw materials and also as markets (List 1841: 268–9; Hobsbawm 1992: 23–45).

Accordingly, the quest for a 'German India' became a virtual 'obsession' (Naranch 2005: 25) from the early 19th Century onwards. Particularly, colonial territories were meant to absorb the huge number of emigrants who left Germany every year mainly to go to North America, a fact that greatly troubled German nationalists (van Laak 2005: 33–7). It is therefore no accident that a colonial quest was part of the German national movement, throughout its dramatic history during the 19th Century. The endeavour for overseas expansion and for controlling migration by channelling migrants, if possible, to 'German lands' generated a host of projects to found German colonies, some of them

2 In the following, I refer primarily to West Germany for the period between 1945–90, when the country was divided into two spheres of influence and from 1949, into two states.

bizarre (Fenske 1991). All of these projects came to naught. Thus, throughout the decades of British conquests in India, and French colonial expansion in north and west Africa, German colonialism remained restricted to the realm of fantasy. However, such a state afforded ample space to articulate the ‘need to feel superior, in control, and the desire for gratification’ within the parameters of a ‘hegemonic discourse’ (Zantop 1997: 209). In this way, fantasy eventually ‘acquired the status of factual “reality”’ (Fenske 1991: 3) and informed attitudes and approaches towards real action on the ground.

Once the German Empire had been created by strategic war making (‘blood and iron’, in Bismarck’s phrase) in 1871, its architect, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, famously declared the new power in the heart of Europe as ‘saturated’. For some years, the Chancellor withstood the continuing clamour for colonies (van Laak 2005: 53; Görtemaker 1994: 300–1). For Bismarck, this attitude was not least in the interests of his diplomatic game in Europe. This main concern was reflected in the Berlin Conference in 1884–85 which laid out the principles along which the European powers agreed to partition the African continent. Two somewhat contradictory mainstays among these principles were, on the one hand, the fictitious proposition to consider much of Africa as ‘no man’s land’ (*terra nullius*) as a pretext to expropriate Africans’ land, and on the other, the proposition of ‘effective control’ over any territories which the powers claimed. This was routinely proven by contracts agreed with local power holders.

The Berlin Conference took place at the high point of the ‘Scramble for Africa’ (see Pakenham 1991). Within a little more than two decades, most of the continent had been

Box 1 The times and scope of German colonialism

1871	Unification, founding of the Empire
1884–85	German East Africa
1884	German South West Africa (Namibia)
1884	Cameroon
1884	Togo
1884	Bismarck Archipelago (Papua New Guinea)
1884	Kaiser-Wilhelm-Land (Papua New Guinea)
1884–85	Berlin Africa (Congo) Conference
1898	Kiaochow (Qingdao)
1899	Mariana Islands
1899	Caroline Islands
1899	Palau
1899	West Samoa
1914–1918	Military occupation of the German colonies by the Entente Powers
1915	End of German rule in South West Africa
1919	Loss of the colonies in the Treaty of Versailles; mandate system



MAP 4 German colonies during the second German Empire, 1883 to 1915.

partitioned and colonised by European powers. Germany joined the fray at a late stage, and its colonial aspirations resulted in a collection of far flung pieces of territory in Africa, as well as, even later, control of islands in the Pacific and of the Chinese port city of Kiaochow, present day Qingdao (see Box 1). These acquisitions implied important changes, not only for the colonised, but for German society and polity as well. However, these acquisitions never diverted from thrusts of German expansionism that in economic and geopolitical terms were more important still. These efforts reached for an informal empire in the Near East and above all, for settlement in Eastern Europe (van Laak 2005: 53–60). ‘In the best of cases’, the colonies Germany had acquired ‘documented her claim to be part of the club of great powers and to pretend to a policy of world wide trade’ (Görtemaker 1994: 351).

By and large, what was assembled as the German colonial empire bore out, in exemplary fashion, the contemporary indictment of the liberal critic of imperialism, John A. Hobson. In his view, colonialism and imperialism amounted to a costly venture for the metropolises, taken as national states or economies, while being a bonanza for a small group of ruthless profiteers (see Hobson 1901/38: ch. 1, section 4). From their beginnings up to their occupation by the Entente Powers in World War I, the colonies Germany acquired were a heavy burden on the imperial treasury. Especially in the initial stages, there were advocates who called for a termination at least of some of the colonial ventures. South West Africa was on top of their list. Above all, Bismarck’s original plan had failed within a few years. In order to shield the treasury from excessive expenditure, the Chancellor had connived to

devolve costs upon the private sector. According to this plan, Bismarck had countenanced the acquisition of colonies on the condition that they would be run by chartered companies and thus pay their own way. However, within a few years, these business ventures failed. Significantly, it was then seen as a matter of national honour and prestige for the state to step in and shoulder the cost of the colonies. Thus, the German colonial venture was an overall disaster in economic terms, even though 'private hands' profited heavily at a huge cost to the public, as opponents complained as a matter of routine (van Laak 2005: 86). This lamentable position was mitigated somewhat by the discovery of diamonds in the southern Namib Desert in 1908, which at last turned GSWA into a going concern.

One of the main objectives which the German colonial movement had pursued steadfastly was blatantly lacking from the colonies the Empire eventually acquired. Up to its closing decade, the 19th Century had been marked by mass overseas emigration from the German territories (see Bade & Oltmer 2011: 68–9). Among the colonies Germany eventually managed to secure, only South West Africa was considered suitable for European settlement, and thus capable of countering the haemorrhage. Yet eventually, 'European' or 'white' settlers in Namibia numbered just slightly over 12,000 on the eve of World War I, while all German colonies combined contained less than 20,000 Germans, including military personnel (*Reichs-Kolonialamt* 1914: 8–35; on Namibia, 24–5). This needs to be compared with a metropolitan population of over 60 million in Germany and a migration drain of several million throughout the 19th Century. The tendency became less pronounced during the closing decades of the century, at the time German colonialism got under way. Mass emigration was stopped by the rapid rise of industrialism and urbanisation (see Bade 2000: 145, 184).

Unfortunately, to say that the German colonies were a failure when held against the original aims of the colonial movement may seem almost irrelevant when we consider the suffering and exploitation that colonial rule entailed for colonised people. Vice versa, these ordeals happened quite independently from economic viability, even though a fair number of individuals made sizeable profits out of the colonies and employed brutal forms of exploitation in the process. What did such colonial practice look like? It is only possible to describe a few dimensions here. These are quite common to colonialism and by no means restricted to German colonial practice.

Colonial practices: valorisation and the mobilisation of assets

Systematically, and from its beginnings, modern colonialism has been linked to the drive of capital constantly to expand its sphere of action and to draw into its orbit new resources (see Luxemburg 1913: pt. III). Such valorisation of colonies was linked, first, to the procurement of raw materials. From its outset, the Industrial Revolution was predicated on the importation of tropical products. This began with cotton and later included a large array of materials such as palm oil derivatives, sisal and jute, processed coconut (copra) and of course, 'new' items of mass consumption such as sugar, tea, coffee and cocoa, as well as tropical fruit. In German everyday life, the latter category of goods was present in specialised stores for

‘colonial commodities’ (*Kolonialwaren*). Cases in point are the sisal plantations in German East Africa and the extensive plantation economy in Cameroon which was linked to the infamous ‘System Putkamer’, named after the governor who presided over the arrangement.

Another much sought after category of primary goods was minerals. The ‘discovery’ of deposits of precious metals was a driving force in the expansion of colonial control. During the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, probably the most dramatic cases were the diamond and gold rushes in South Africa. In neighbouring Namibia, the copper mines of Tsumeb were of some importance before the discovery of diamonds in the southern part of the Namib Desert in 1908 brought the colony closer to economic viability for the first time.

Furthermore, colonies benefitted the metropolises as markets for industrial products, the flip side of their role as purveyors of raw materials. This was the pattern of the international division of labour that was established at the beginning of industrialism in the mid-18th Century and lasted up to the late 20th Century. The quest for markets drove in particular the violent opening of China from the Opium War in 1840 onwards, where Germany later claimed the province of Shandong, the hinterland of Kiaochow, as her sphere of influence.

However, on a much smaller scale, traders were active in the colonies supplying consumer items, and missionaries admonished converts to cover themselves, often in industrially produced cotton cloth. Such material also had to be purchased on the commodity market. In this way, newly introduced needs also generated a need for money, which had to be procured by wage labour or by the sale of commodities or assets. The imposition of tax was used widely also, to mobilise native labour power. In Namibia, the imposition of colonial rule was tantamount to the fact that Germany as the new colonial power inserted herself into the existing trading network centred on the Cape and Walvis Bay. Rising debts of Africans, as individuals as well as communities, were due to a variety of reasons (Henrichsen 2011: 183–6). These debts were redeemed by sales of land and cattle thus serving as an important entry point for clearing the ground for white, above all German, settlement. Indebtedness and attendant loss of land and cattle form regularly cited causes that drove people into armed resistance in Namibia during the first years of the 20th Century.

Apart from the extraction of raw material resources and trade, settlement was the third main objective of colonialism. For this, land alienation was of particular strategic importance. Besides the Americas and Australia and other portions of Oceania, parts of southern and eastern Africa were shaped into settler colonies. Generally, this policy entailed the expulsion of autochthones from their land, frequently in connection with genocidal campaigns (Moses 2008). In other cases, particularly in Africa, the colonised were restricted to reserves and served as cheap labour power in settler agriculture and particularly in South Africa, in mining as well. As has been indicated, Namibia was the only German colony that offered any serious prospect of white settlement, while spots like the Usambara Mountains in Tanzania or Western Samoa were numerically negligible in terms of settlers who could be placed there.

Significantly, the ideological aim of creating a ‘New Germany’ overseas was not seriously impaired by such practical limitations. The colonies, and in particular the settler colonies,

seemed to provide a sphere of retreat from city life and the promise of a pristine, rural, idyllic existence far removed from the temptations and corruption of modern civilisation. At the same time, the colonies were pictured as an external arena, where young men could be given opportunities for adventure that were no longer available at home, besides a chance of getting rich quickly. Both features coalesced to an extent where employers frequently claimed a 'paternal' right to inflict bodily punishment on workers, often for trifling offences.

As mentioned above, the colonies Germany managed to secure during the last one-and-a-half decades of the 19th Century did not measure up to proclaimed requirements and high-flown aims, such as that of creating a German dominated 'Middle Africa' to match British India. Overall, the practical use of German colonies for the metropole was low, and their performance remained poor, in spite of various attempts at colonial reform during the last of the three decades of German colonial rule.

Colonial practices: violent confrontations

There can be little doubt that the German Empire pursued its colonial aims with a great deal of brutality, and so did individual settlers, farmers or traders. Apart from an array of greater and lesser colonial scandals that underscored abuses by colonial administrators and the military, the short time span of three decades was littered with military engagements, mostly to subdue the so-called rebellions and insurgencies – acts of anti-colonial resistance (see Box 2). To these must be added German participation in the international intervention to put down the *Ihetuan* movement ('Boxer Rebellion') in China in 1901. On the occasion of sending off the troops, Emperor William II infamously admonished the soldiers to emulate the Huns, the invaders who had created havoc in Europe some 1500 years before and were considered to be particularly barbaric and ruthless.³

Some key military figures were involved in consecutive campaigns. Thus, General Lothar von Trotha, who became responsible for the genocide committed in Namibia in 1904–05, had served before in the war to put down the Wahehe 'rising' in East Africa and had participated in the China expedition. There were also cases of German officers who started their African careers in the Congo Free State, the private realm of King Leopold II of Belgium, to move on to positions as military officers and colonial administrators in German East Africa and South West Africa (see Gewald 2005).

The long list of military engagements and campaigns does not pretend to be complete. Still, it supports the view of warfare as a frequent if not constant feature of colonial rule. Aptly, Werner Hillebrecht (2015: 47) recently characterised the situation by counter-posing the colonialist image of 'Ten Year Peace', which ostensibly followed in Namibia, with the subjugation of Hendrik Witbooi and his followers in 1894, a 'Ten Year War'. This picture does

3 Connected with the immediate outcry caused by the Emperor's speech, there are a number of versions of it, some claimed to be original, others obviously edited. For the official, most probably mitigated version see Penzler 1904: 205–7; for both that and the version reported in the media, Görtemaker 1994: 356–7; see also <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/dokumente/wilhelm00/> (20.1.2010); for an English version, see http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=755 (20.1.2010).

Box 2 Violent confrontations under German colonial rule

1888–1889	Abushiri Rebellion (Tanzania)
1888–1898	Wahehe War (Tanzania)
1890–1894	Subjection of Witbooi in Namibia
12.4.1893	Assault on Witbooi settlement at Hornkranz (Namibia)
1892–1893	Nyamwezi Rising (Tanzania)
1892–1893	Wachagga Rising (Tanzania)
1894	Subjection of Khauas (Namibia)
1894–1895	War against Dagomba (Northern Togo)
1894–1895	Swahili Revolt (Tanzania)
1894–1898	Subjection of Gogo, Yao and Haya (Tanzania)
1895	Punitive expeditions against three Nama groups (Namibia)
1896	Resistance by Yaundé (Cameroon)
1896	Risings of Mbanderu and Khauas (Namibia)
1897–1898	Risings of three Nama groups and of Herero groups (Namibia)
1898–1901	Resistance by Boulou and Bassa (Cameroon)
1898	Punitive expeditions against three Nama groups (Namibia)
1903–1908	Namibian War, genocide of Herero and Nama (Namibia)
1904–1911	Risings in Cameroon
1905–1907	Maji-Maji War in continental Tanzania
1914	Douala Rising in Cameroon

not yet reflect the pervasive and systematic application of violence as a means of imposing and reproducing colonial rule. Even though it was not possible for colonial administrators to show continuous presence throughout the territory formally under their control, administrative routine was marked by a systematic exertion of violence, precisely because of the intermittent appearance of personnel on the spot. This has been documented even for the comparatively calm colony of Togo, as a chain of tours by administrators enforcing control, supplemented by the occasional ‘*razzia*’ or round-up raid, when colonial troops descended on colonised people in a spate of violent destruction and plunder.⁴

Settler colonies generally were marked by a specific dynamic, as a consequence of the settlement project itself. In one way or another, this project was predicated on large scale alienation of land in a much more systematic fashion than in cases where colonisation was limited to setting up plantations, to forced cultivation, forced labour, the extraction of tax and the like. As Leopold’s Congo testified, such ventures at plantation colonies could also produce regimes of terror, and a recent account puts the death toll there at a staggering 13

⁴ See Trotha 1994a; for comparative views and the basic conceptual framework see Spittler 1981: 65–69, 1978: 65–7.

million lives (Ndaywel 1998: 344). Even though numerically well below that scale, the death tolls connected to the scandals in German colonies (that came to public attention) were clear indicators of the brutality of regimes that prevailed in many plantation colonies, as well as of their deadly potential. Still, settler colonies were different. These ventures were marked by the quest of securing land for greater numbers of people who intended not only to secure resources but to stay permanently as a privileged group, starkly set off from the natives. Besides dispossession, the latter were crushed more or less systematically in the case of resistance. This as well as the unequal competition for land entailed a genocidal tendency.⁵

Alternatively, indigenes were restricted to 'reserves', small tracts of land cut out from their former realms, and they were regimented as cheap labour. The need for labourers countervailed the genocidal tendency inherent in settler colonialism. Arguably also for this reason, genocide, with its inherent intent to exterminate, was not a regular or even frequent occurrence in modern colonialism. In this respect, the Namibian War that enthralled the German settler colony (then named South West Africa) between 1903 and 1908 stands out as a rare event, and the severe loss of lives triggered debate precisely on the issue of the future supply of labour power (cf. below and ch. 5). A further peculiarity of this war was the high number of German soldiers who were deployed there. In contradistinction to most other colonial wars, in this case soldiers were not mainly recruited within the colonial sphere but the vast majority were brought from the metropole, which also led to a much higher number of casualties amongst Germans (Mann 2003: 25–6; see ch. 3). Inevitably, this specific feature had consequences for the way the war was communicated inside Germany. Also on account of such peculiarities, German rule in Namibia has been cited repeatedly to demonstrate supposed specifics of German colonialism.

On account of these considerations, one may argue that the Namibian War stood out in the long chain of larger and smaller military confrontations that took place in the German colonies. The single, central event – and certainly the most controversial and debated one – of the period of German colonialism occurred when the same kind of warfare was employed in Namibia that had been tried and refined in East Africa and in China.⁶ This happened in an effort to terminate the Herero–German War after initial Herero successes. At the head of a fortified German expeditionary corps, the newly arrived General Lothar von Trotha aimed at a decisive battle, as called for by German military doctrine after the image of the Battle of Sedan, which in 1870 had been the turning point of the German–French War, thus creating the conditions for founding the unified Empire (Hull 2003, 2005: chapters 1&2; 2008). Trotha saw himself involved in a 'race war' (as quoted in Hull 2005: 59) and had gone on record before the decisive battle with his intention to 'destroy the rebellious tribes by shedding rivers of blood and money' (as quoted in Drechsler 1966: 154). However, the battle of Ohamakari on August 11, 1904 ended inconclusively, and Trotha ordered his troops to pursue the Ovaherero men,

5 For differentiating case studies, see Moses 2008.

6 For a broader comparative perspective, encompassing the Namibian War as well as the Filipino-US War roughly at the same time, and what amounted to genocide by Italian troops in Cyrenaica (Libya) in the 1920s, see Krienbaum 2010a; also Gewald 2005; Wojak & Meinel 2004. For German colonial war practice in various theatres of war, see Kuss 2010.

women and children, who were retreating, along with their cattle herds, eastwards into the Omaheke sandveld. Only some seven weeks later, after many thousands already had died from thirst, starvation and exhaustion, did Trotha issue his infamous 'extermination proclamation'. This proclamation stated that the Herero were no longer German subjects and had to leave the country, or they would be shot, armed or unarmed (Pool 1991: 272).

From further evidence, such as Trotha's diary (Pool 1991: 272–4), the intention to annihilate the Ovaherero can hardly be doubted. Indeed, this aim was endorsed in Berlin by Chief of the Great General Staff von Schlieffen when evaluating the situation in the colony. Schlieffen endorsed Trotha's plan warmly; he regretted only that the strategy, while commendable, was unrealistic and therefore had to be revised (Drechsler 1966: 163).

In terms of the UN Genocide Convention of 1948, such intention to annihilate a group, which the perpetrator has defined for that purpose, is the decisive criterion for the crime of genocide.⁷ The subsequent internment of whole groups or 'tribes' in concentration camps, where they were subjected to 'murder through deliberate neglect' (Zimmerer 2008: 56) effectively pursued the same aim, as did deportations of Nama prisoners to Togo and Cameroon, partly years after the official end of the war in 1907.⁸ This is also true of the Native Ordinances of 1906–07. Under these ordinances, all lands held by 'insurgent' groups were expropriated wholesale; survivors were regimented into a labour force for the settlers (Zimmerer 2001: 68–94). These regulations also helped to prevent Africans from reconstituting their communal life, and thus, in the words of the Convention against the Crime of Genocide, imply acts 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part'.⁹

Large-scale atrocities were perpetrated in other German colonies as well. Thus, the Maji Maji War (1905–07) which covered the whole of the south of today's continental Tanzania, claimed up to 300,000 lives (Becker & Beez 2005: Iliffe 1969: ch. 2) and methods of exploitation in Cameroon were comparable to the notorious conditions in the Congo Free State (Marx 2004: 135). However, the Namibian War stands out as an explicit strategy of genocide followed by the German military, at least for a certain period of time.¹⁰ Because of the need for settlers to acquire large tracts of land, there are good reasons to see a connection between a tendency to commit genocide and colonial settlement projects such as in Namibia (see Moses 2008). Yet genocide was not inevitable, as attested by other settler colonies in Africa, such as Kenya or Zimbabwe, where land alienation and labour recruitment were brutally enforced, and later on, settler privilege was defended with even greater brutality, but without exterminatory intent.

⁷ See ch. 1, fn. 6.

⁸ Hillebrecht 2008; Kössler 2005b: 181–2; Hillebrecht & Melber 1988.

⁹ Recent argument that the Convention narrowly focuses on actual killing is therefore irrelevant (Häussler 2013: 149–50 & *passim*).

¹⁰ There is some disagreement about exactly when this strategy set in – whether Trotha actually arrived with the genocidal intention (Zimmerer 2008; Drechsler 1980) or whether that intention evolved from failure at outright military victory for the Herero at the Waterberg (Häussler & Trotha 2012; Häussler 2011, 2013; Kuss 2010; Hull 2005).

A PUBLIC GENOCIDE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN THE METROPOLE

The campaigns in Namibia had far reaching impacts on metropolitan Germany. For one, the genocide in Namibia was one of the very few amongst comparable mass crimes in the 20th Century that was committed more or less in full view of the public in the metropole (or 'at home'). Whereas in most cases perpetrators tried to hide their deeds by various devices (Gellately & Kiernan 2003), in Namibia, German authorities as well as individual perpetrators, made little secret about what they were doing and even revelled in their exploits.

The toll of lives the war in Namibia demanded among *Schutztruppe* soldiers 'for the first time brought real public attention to the colonies' in Germany (van Laak 2005: 85). At the same time, treatment of the war and ensuing debate in the press was marked early on by 'utmost openness and brutality' (Sobich 2006: 101). The two-volume publication of the Great General Staff (*Kriegsgesch. Abt.* 1906, 1907) extolled the exploits of the German troops referring explicitly to the genocide (see ch. 3).

The rationale of this strategy was openly debated in public, largely not in humanist but in purely utilitarian terms. For instance, Paul Rohrbach, the settlement commissioner in German South West Africa, and a prominent liberal proponent of imperialism, noted with dismay the 'unhappy principle of "annihilation" inherent in the conduct of the war' (Rohrbach 1909b: 177) and bemoaned this strategy of 'indulg[ing] in the luxury first to mete out the punishment of dying from thirst to so many thousands of natives, because once their tribal independence and their old property rights [were] disposed of, economic life was in need of them as labour power' (Rohrbach 1907: 261). Thus, for Rohrbach regret about the mass killings blended seamlessly with advocating the destruction of communal life and the absolute subjugation of Africans. For him, this was an established, and salubrious, fact. Elsewhere, he noted the chances for settlement in southern Namibia once a clean slate had been made of the tribal property which the 'Hottentots' had 'forfeited by their present rebellion' (Rohrbach 1909a: 206).

Popular accounts, memoir volumes and novels made no effort to hide even gruesome details. Some revelled in the extermination of Ovaherero in the waterless sandveld. In Germany, right wing or 'patriotic' civil society organisations systematically propagated colonialism and tried to orchestrate reporting about the colonies with the production of a 'flood' of colonially related fiction (Brehl 2007, 2008; Warmbold 1982: 125, and see ch. 3).

In view of the postcolonial amnesia encountered later on, this aggressive popularisation drive is particularly remarkable. Surely, such aggressive publicity contributed considerably to the inculcation of race framing (Grosse 2005) and to rendering banal the idea of brute force against the racialised other. This tendency is also clear from certain aspects of German consumer culture during the first decade and a half of the 20th Century: Images and texts popularised 'mass murder' – even though of bugs – and the killing of Africans who were used as symbols for ink stains one wished to wash out (Ciarlo 2011: 83–6).

Of course, debate about what happened in the African colonies also took the form of more formal political controversy. The main stage here was the *Reichstag*, the imperial

parliament of the day. Here, the Social Democrats and the Centre Party, which represented the Catholic petty bourgeois and worker milieu, were at least potentially in a majority. Speakers of both parties lashed out at colonial excesses, if not at colonialism as such. In particular August Bebel, the Social Democratic patriarch and parliamentary leader, dubbed the struggle of the Ovaherero as a 'fight in despair', barely a few days after the war had begun. Bebel saw responsibility for such despair precisely in the Ovaherero loss of 'their former independence and freedom', and likened this struggle to that of Arminius, styled at the time as one of the great German national heroes for his victory over the Romans in the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD. Referring to the execution of Ovaherero leaders, Bebel exclaimed: 'But this is the world turned upside down. In truth, the Herero defend the country which has been theirs for centuries, which they view as their heritage given to them by the Gods, and which they are obliged to defend by employing all means at their disposal' (Bebel 1904: 581, 584). Thus, albeit with little solid knowledge about the situation on the ground, Bebel framed the anti-colonial resistance struggle in terms of a dogged defence of 'altars and hearths' (*pro aris et focis*), so sacred in European imagery.

Roughly a year later, Bebel lashed out at Trotha's conducting of the war, likening it to that of 'any butcher's henchman', a 'barbarous kind of war making', rendering the perpetrator unfit to lay claim to civilisation or Christianity (Bebel 1905a: 697). The parliamentary conflict came to a head when in late 1906 the imperial government used a procedural issue to dissolve parliament and to call snap elections. In December 1906, the SPD and the Centre in parliamentary committee refused to approve additional funds for the southern railway from Lüderitz to Keetmanshoop; this railway had been considered to be of strategic importance during the persisting guerrilla war waged mainly by Nama. The recalcitrance the two parties demonstrated in parliamentary committee presented an opportunity to Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, who prevailed on the Emperor to proclaim the dissolution of parliament and consequently, early elections. Bülow linked his move to a major reshuffle of German parliamentary politics. He engineered an unprecedented alliance of all conservative and liberal parties. In particular amongst the left wing of German liberalism, this shift was seen as a turn towards aggressive 'world politics' (Rohrbach 1908: 28).

During the election campaign, the government and its allies claimed that the majority parties had behaved unpatriotically in withholding funds from the soldiers supposedly fighting for the fatherland in South West Africa. Bülow's tactic was successful, and in the 1907 elections, his '*bloc*' returned with a parliamentary majority.¹¹ This success was predicated, besides using features of the electoral system, on an unprecedented mobilisation of right-wing civil society organisations which spread aggressive propaganda about the exploits of German troops in Namibia (Sobich 2006; Nipperdey 1998: 601; Wehler 1995: 1079–80). Still, in 1907, all of this did not go completely unchallenged. Social Democrats retaliated with electoral propaganda strongly critical of the war and its conduct (Short 2004).

11 van der Heyden 2008; Crothers 1941; contrary to widespread perceptions and some recent myth making (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 127, fn.1), the Social Democrats did not lose, but actually gained in the popular vote, but suffered severe losses in parliamentary seats, due to Bülow's *bloc* tactics.

From today's vantage point, these exchanges form part of the process of entangled history, where a turning point of 'German' history was predicated on what had happened in Namibia, and in turn, the course of 'Namibian' history would have been unthinkable without decisions and stratagems that came from Berlin. Such interconnectedness points to a complex array of relationships, which however should not obliterate the power differentials that are implicated in such entanglement. Far from constituting a level playing field, the colonial relationship constitutes these processes that weave together the colony and the metropole and decisively also shape the postcolonial situation (Randeria 2002, 1999; Conrad & Randeria 2013: 39–48). In the case of 1906–07, Bülow clearly used the colonial war for his political stratagems, but at the same time, this action had more far reaching consequences (see ch. 3).

In the short run, the most conspicuous consequences of these elections were the break-up of the former parliamentary majority and the only electoral defeat the Social Democrats sustained before World War I. This might well have influenced the tactics of the SPD in 1914 when it flinched from opposing war, possibly for fear of another chauvinist backlash (van der Heyden 2008).

On closer inspection, the mobilisation on the right would appear at least as important. The civil society organisations mobilised during the campaign included the array of groups who clamoured for Germany's greatness and for this, addressed an array of issues besides the colonies. These bodies comprised in particular the Navy League (*Flottenverein*) and the Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*), but one may also include veterans' groups or agrarian associations. The array of rightist and nationalist organisations which galvanised in the context of what was dubbed 'Hottentot Elections' corresponds closely with the ascendancy of 'radical nationalism'. According to Geoff Eley (1978), this current gained momentum in Germany from the 1890s onwards and contributed considerably towards transforming the public climate during the years before World War II. The formation of an informal 'imperialist party' aligned liberals with proponents of *Lebensraum* (space to live), which was to become a watchword of the German Right and also of Nazism from the 1920s onwards. In this way, the possession and acquisition specifically of settlement colonies were entrenched in German nationalist ideology for the decades to come (Smith 1986: 118–29).

Since Namibia was the only settlement colony Germany acquired, it took on particular meaning within the ideological framework just outlined. Add to this the images of strenuous pioneers and valiant soldiers who fought in the Namibian War, the single major military engagement of the German army which had occurred during the time stretch between unification in 1871 and the beginning of World War I in 1914. These considerations may convey some idea of the reasons why, in the German public mind, Namibia was linked largely to the Namibian War and to the aggressive ways in which it had been communicated as a heroic feat – the last victorious war which could be boasted about by German nationalists. Of course, this still held true after defeat in World War I and the loss of the colonies by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

THE 'FIRST POSTCOLONIAL NATION'

Along with the poor overall economic performance of the German colonies, the short duration of Germany's actual role as a colonial power may well account for the fact that in Germany, colonialism played an ideological role, rather than one of economic importance. As noted, fantasies about colonial ventures had played a significant role in German nationalism before 1870; similarly, the image of the lost colonial empire, making Germany 'a postcolonial nation in a still-colonial world' (Klotz 2005: 141), only aggravated the injury to national narcissism and the resentment engendered by what was perceived on the German Right as discriminatory treatment by the Versailles dispensation. Such sentiments were predicated on the idea of an inherent right of 'civilised' nations to have colonies, and by taking away Germany's colonies, the victorious Entente Powers had, by implication, denied her the status of being civilised (Kössler 2014b: 104). The Entente Powers, and South Africa in particular (see Silvester & Gewald 2003), pointed precisely to such crimes as the genocide in Namibia to demonstrate that Germany was unfit to be a colonial power. In this, they re-affirmed a global hierarchy where the colonial powers stood at the top of civilisation and the colonised were relegated to the lowest rung. Being ousted from the club of colonisers meant for Germany exclusion from the club of the truly 'civilised'. Not so dissimilar from the largely symbolic and phantasmagorical character of German colonialism, then, its enforced end had above all symbolic and ideological implications.

In the German nationalist backlash against the reasoning which underlay the Versailles dispensation, polemic against the 'war guilt lie' (*Kriegsschuldlüge*) loomed large. This referred to the circumstances of the beginning of World War I in 1914.¹² As a corollary, a similar construction pointed to an ostensible 'colonial guilt lie' (*Kolonialschuldlüge*). This situation has been characterised as one of 'phantom pains', i.e. suffering for what was lost, conceptualised as the 'new German soil' (*neudeutsche Erd*). This perception motivated an attitude of colonialism without colonies (Kreutzer 2007: 179). Colonial revisionism, which took its cue from such sentiments, therefore also reached 'many Germans . . . who had traditionally shown little enthusiasm for colonialism' but felt slighted by the Versailles Treaty, as did a good number of Social Democrats (Schilling 2014: 4). The quest to regain the lost colonies was significant for the policy of the Weimar Republic, particularly in relation to Namibia where the German Government tried to safeguard the ethnic identity and national allegiance of the remaining German settlers (Eberhardt 2007: 99–151; ch. 4 below).

The colonial quest was kept alive by state sponsored efforts to secure new land for settlement in Namibia on a private ownership basis (Eberhardt 2007: 108, 142–51), or by promoting 'German' bananas that came from German owned plantations in Cameroon (Linne 2008: 38–40, 56–61), as well as goods such as cocoa and coffee, conveniently advertised by employing 'representations of blacks' (Schilling 2014: 51).

¹² On occasion of the centenary of the beginning of World War I, it was noted that this issue seems still to occupy the public mind in Germany, see Wirsching 2014.

Civil society organisations, in particular the German Colonial Society (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*), maintained intense activity to keep the ‘colonial idea’ in the public mind (Pogge von Strandmann 2002). Both this body and its women’s branch experienced a sustained expansion of membership throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, when they were absorbed into *Gleichschaltung*, the enforced conformity imposed on civil society organisations under Nazi rule; colonial dreams were propagated by social events such as an elaborate annual colonial ball in Berlin (Schilling 2014: 41–48).

The surge in production and consumption of novels and memoirs related to colonial issues testified to a perceived need to ‘give testimony’ (Krüger 2003: 129) about a period ‘cut short’,¹³ but which authors and readers hoped to revive in the not too distant future (see also Schilling 2014: ch. 1). Again, numerous new colonial memorial monuments went up, and a fair number of such monuments were transferred from the former German colonies to be re-erected in German towns and cities (Zeller 2000: 140–68). The Colonial Society also lobbied quite successfully for naming streets, particularly in new housing developments, to keep the lost colonies in the public mind (Lindner 2007: 293–5).

Still, for all its impact on the public sphere and the public mind in Germany, the success of the colonial revisionist movement was limited. According to a recent account, while colonial discourse reached its apogee in Germany during the interwar years, the colonial (revisionist) movement got stuck in sclerosis; eventually, it moved towards the extreme right, resuscitating the theme of emigration from an ethnicist (*völkisch*) position (Patin 2010: 81–2). This made it all the easier for the Nazis to absorb the bulk of the colonial revisionist movement and its adherents. Accordingly, despite considerable ambiguity concerning actual colonial policy and quests, the Nazis easily incorporated the various bodies into their front organisations in the course of *Gleichschaltung* (Wegmann 2012a: 205–10; Linne 2008: 26–33). The onset of World War II and Nazi Germany’s initial victories fired hopes for a new colonial empire, but the main thrust of colonial endeavour was directed towards the conquests in Eastern Europe. Many of the former agents of colonialism, as well as institutions serving it and also economic enterprises involved in colonial ventures, turned to this new colonial sphere in the vast occupied regions, particularly in Poland and the Soviet Union (Zimmerer 2011: ch. 10; see also Linne 2008: 70–2, 147–51). In this way, the colonial discourse remained largely unbroken in Germany right up to the cataclysmic end of any dreams about territorial expansion, be it in Africa, in Eastern Europe or elsewhere, with the complete defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945.¹⁴

13 Schilling 2014: 5 also uses this phrase to point in particular to the consequence that ‘Germany never had an experience of the “empire striking back”’.

14 For further relevant aspects, see ch. 3.

POSTCOLONIAL AMNESIA

After the end of World War II, any colonial revisionism was of course out of the question. This led to a distinct discursive break. In West Germany, nurturing colonial traditions like that of the *Schutztruppe* was relegated to marginal groups (Conrad 2008: 119–22; Krüger 2003: 121–3; below chs 5, 6), while a majority saw themselves preoccupied with more pressing issues, such as survival at first and participating in the ‘Economic Miracle’ later. In the course of post-war reconstruction, which in (West) Germany in many ways amounted to restoration, phantom pain gave way to a kind of ‘relief’ from any implication in the conflicts around independence and decolonisation which confronted colonial powers such as France or Britain. Such sentiments were linked to a delusion of not having to deal with the reality of a postcolonial past, or the present ramifications of postcolonial conflict (Kreutzer 2007: 179). In this way, the former colonies occupied the public mind only occasionally and episodically. Even where the Anti-Apartheid Movement organised solidarity with the liberation struggles in southern Africa, Namibia did not figure very prominently, and hardly on account of its past as a German colony.¹⁵

One remarkable event, which actually confronted a vestige of the colonial past, is indicative of such amnesia with respect to Germany’s colonial past. In 1967, rebellious students began a campaign for the removal of the statue of erstwhile Governor of German East Africa, Herrmann Wissmann, in front of Hamburg University. In a leaflet, the students protested that this monument amongst others had a ‘reactionary, revanchist, imperialist, militarist and fascist’ message (quoted in Zeller 2000: 209, fn. 521). In this way, the activists called for Wissmann’s removal as a vestige of a reactionary past, not specifically as a colonial monument. The statue, which had been relocated from Dar es Salaam in 1922, was eventually pulled down by students a second time, in 1968, after it had been put back on its pedestal by the university authorities following the first removal. Even though this action was directed against a monument glorifying an important German colonialist, the action took its ‘reference from the present’ and was intended as a protest against the then current wars in Vietnam and Congo–Kinshasa more than as a thorough engagement with Germany’s past as a colonial power (Cornils 2011: 201; Uhlmann 2007; Zeller 2000: 209). Obviously, at the time, Germany’s role as a colonial power was largely absent from the student movement’s concerns.¹⁶

Still, this is an indication that colonial amnesia should not be seen as coterminous with a medical state of blotting out any memory. Rather, it denotes here a public attitude of not addressing a past that in principle is known, but for various reasons is not a topic of attention

15 Kössler & Melber 2006: 105, 112–3, 116–7. An interesting instance, even though with reference to East Africa/Tanzania, is the documentation of left wing activities in the Lettow-Vorbeck barracks in Hamburg during the late 1970s – in a considerable body of pronouncements, there was hardly any reference to the colonial background of the namesake of the place: http://www.mao-projekt.de/BRD/NOR/HBG/Hamburg_Bundeswehr_Lettow_Vorbeck_Kaserne_Wandsbek.shtml (18.2.2014).

16 This is also conceded by Schilling (2014: 132–32).

and discussion¹⁷. Occasional references to former German colonies in various magazines (Albrecht 2011) did not seriously change the state of colonial amnesia. Also, awareness of colonial episodes or connections, such as memories handed down within families (Schilling 2014: ch. 6) by itself is not enough to effectively counter the silent resolve¹⁸ of publicly not addressing the colonial past. In another connection, even the very vivid engagement of West German foreign policy with the 'Namibia question' during the 1980s (Genscher 2014) 'arguably, . . . did not evoke the legacy of German colonialism' (Schilling 2014: 151).

For German society, the collapse of the Nazi state, even then experienced as liberation by only a minority, amounted to a military and economic, but above all an unheard of, moral catastrophe. It was probably not a majority who realised that the actual catastrophe had taken place in 1933, when power was handed to the Nazis, and not in 1945, when arguably the most criminal dictatorship in human history, which all along enjoyed wide and even majority support amongst Germans, was at last defeated by the Allies. In any case, the cataclysm forced a fundamental review of the national self-image. The process that evolved has been seen as pioneering an almost evolutionary leap, which has been discussed for some time as the 'postnational constellation' (Habermas 2001). In other quarters, this process, stretching through more than four post-war decades, has been seen as an equally paradigmatic or even exemplary construction of a 'culture of remembrance' (A. Assmann 2013: 30–3).

Indeed, 1945 and subsequent developments do mark a sea change in public, state sponsored memory politics. This discursive turning point becomes clearer if we take a brief look at classical routine in such matters. In his seminal speech on the concept of the nation, Ernest Renan more than 130 years ago observed that nations are brought together by a common will, much less than, for example, by supposedly common ancestry, or even by shared language and culture. To a large extent, such common will would rely on shared experience, but Renan stressed that nations were at least as much communities of forgetting as they were communities of remembrance. Referring to his native France, Renan considered it essential that 'all have forgotten' historical horrors or atrocities such as the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre, when in 1572 French Protestants were murdered in droves in Paris and elsewhere, or the hecatombs killed in the Albigensian crusade of the 13th Century in south-western France (Renan 1882: 11). Obviously, also in this respect, 'forgetting' must not be taken literally. Renan meant to say that mentioning, let alone publicly debating these well-known facts, would be deleterious to national consensus. Community then rests on a more or less silent agreement over not addressing such sensitive matters.¹⁹

The civilisational break that is marked by the Holocaust (see also Elias 1996: ch. 3), earlier referred to by the emblematic concentration camp of Auschwitz, rendered this

17 Kössler 2014c, 2011b; see also the in-depth discussion of relevant interdisciplinary positions in Dimbath 2014: 21–39; 69–80; this highlights 'forgetting' as an agency and as at least potentially intentional.

18 To take up the term '*kommunikatives Beschweigen*' coined by Lübke (1983: 594), with reference to studied silence over the Nazi past in post-World War II West Germany.

19 I have referred to this by the German term '*Nicht-Thematisierung*' (Kössler 2014c, 2011b:75).

hallowed strategy unsustainable. There were and remain strenuous attempts to keep to the strategy of refusing to address such dire past and in fact, deny it. The trajectory that led up to a situation where some in Germany, on fairly dubious grounds, revel in the idea of being ‘world champions of remembrance’ (A. Assmann 2013: 59) is instructive for putting the current conflict about the 1904–08 colonial genocide in Namibia into proper perspective.²⁰

When confronted with what had happened in the concentration camps right after the end of the war, many Germans responded with outright shock; only a few years later, however, a sustained strategy was deployed in West Germany to close the chapter of dealing with the Nazi past. Beginning immediately after the establishment of the Federal Republic in September 1949, this strategy proved quite successful for a number of years. Nazi officials were brought back into sometimes very high positions, convicted criminals were pardoned and further criminal proceedings forestalled (Frei 1996). Not by coincidence, Theodor W. Adorno articulated his well-founded concern that ‘the slain . . . will yet be deceived of that one gift our powerlessness is capable to offer them: remembrance’ (Adorno 1963: 128); consequently, Adorno developed a programme for ‘working through the past’. He hoped to educate the German public and also to address the socio-economic and cultural conditions that had made possible unspeakable horrors, so that ‘the spell may be broken by clear awareness’ of what had happened (Adorno 1963: 133–4, 125).

The spell, which had been laid over openly dealing with the Nazi past and in particular over prosecuting perpetrators effectively, was broken to a certain extent around 1960. A series of anti-Semitic actions, inscriptions of swastikas on the Cologne synagogue, triggered a growing awareness that a more critical attitude was called for in relation to the national past and the Nazi cataclysm (Meseth 2005: 98–9). This was re-enforced by the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem (Arendt 1965: 16–19) and later, by the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt-on-Maine (1963–68) and an array of further trials that brought to court some of the perpetrators from Nazi concentration camps. The following decades saw some strenuous, if halting, efforts to live up to the obligation of addressing the dire past of Nazi rule.²¹ These efforts included considerable programmes of popular education and several thrusts of intensive historical research, interrupted by comparative lulls. Specifically the 1980s saw a combination of state events commemorating the 50th anniversary of transfer of power to the Nazis in 1933 and the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II in 1945, along with fierce public controversy about the interpretation of Nazi crimes which was labelled *Historikerstreit*, historians’ argument (Frei 2005: 45–62). Similarly, judicial forms of dealing with Nazi crimes came up against serious obstacles and outright sabotage; if the Auschwitz trial marked a turning point, it came about only through the personal initiative of courageous outsiders (Frei 2005: 41–44, 69–81). The success of their efforts often hinged on marginal and contingent conditions. Moreover, from 1965, all crimes

20 The following maps, in brief, the trajectory mainly of official positions. Recent debate about the relationship of generational conflict and remembrance of the Holocaust cannot be addressed here; see in particular, A. Assmann 2013; Jureit & Schneider 2010.

21 For a periodisation, see Meseth 2005: 98–111.

except first degree murder had been superannuated, and thousands of perpetrators could no longer be persecuted.

Even more importantly, all such efforts ran up against claims and pleas that it should now be over with and a 'final stroke' should at last be made. What happened was the opposite: Ever new groups of victims of the Holocaust emerged, as well as groups who had suffered from other aspects of Nazi rule, in particular in occupied Europe during the first half of the 1940s. Sinti and Roma made their claims for recognition, as did homosexuals and various categories of people who had been coerced and deported into forced labour during World War II. Importantly, the (West) German state was anything but forthcoming in acceding to such claims and demands; rather, every stage was marked by various degrees of recalcitrance, and it took sustained efforts by victim groups and their supporters, sometimes outright struggle, to reach some modicum of success.

Similar observations can be made about public response. As late as the 1990s, the German public was rocked by bitter controversy about an exhibition that documented crimes committed on a systematic basis by the German army in occupied zones of Eastern Europe during World War II. Based on extensive research, the public display of such insights, which exploded the myth about the supposedly untainted army – as against other armed formations such as the SS²² – provoked an outcry and angry demonstrations.²³ Again, forced labourers who had been regimented from Eastern Europe during World War II were only indemnified after a court case had been initiated in the United States of America (U.S.A.) under the Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA) and an out of court settlement was reached in 1999 under the auspices of the Red–Green government that had come into office in 1998.²⁴

Still, in spite of its attendant conflicts and difficulties, the process of approaching a public acknowledgement of the Holocaust in Germany, as well as the ongoing struggles and controversies, marks a significant change in public memory practices in comparison to the established routine such as articulated and advocated by Renan. In Germany today, remembrance of the crimes perpetrated under Nazi rule, and above all negotiation – and at times, contention – about the contents of such remembrance, certainly are essential for the making of a credible national self-image. This is apparent in official forms of commemoration, such as observing the days of liberation of the most well-known concentration camps or the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe almost adjacent to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, which was unveiled in 2005. Later, additional sites were added within the central precinct of Berlin, the Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted under Nazism in 2008 and the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under the National Socialist Regime in 2012. Again, this process has not been uncontroversial, among other things, with respect to memorials being dedicated to specific groups, which then gave rise to further claims for

22 Acronym for *Schutzstaffel*; Nazi army formation.

23 Eventually, a number of inaccuracies were acknowledged and the exhibition was closed temporarily in 1997 and re-launched in a revised version a few years later. For an English summary, see http://www.verbrechender-wehrmacht.de/pdf/vdw_en.pdf (accessed 14.12.2012); the brochure also refers to the public controversy and revision (pp. 34–6).

24 <http://www.stiftung-evz.de/start.html> (accessed 14.12.2012); see Goshler et al. 2012.

recognition. Significantly, in September 2011, members of the Namibian delegation who had come to Berlin to receive deported human skulls (see ch. 12), when viewing the Holocaust Memorial and other memorial sites in Berlin, posed the question: 'What about us?' In this way, they articulated a trend towards an 'international morality' which has developed some momentum internationally, in particular relating to various categories of Holocaust victims, but also to Armenians, and quite conceivably beyond (Schaller 2011: 267–71).

Undeniably, any drawing of comparisons and parallels here is fraught with grave ethical as well as methodological problems. In any case, the way German memorial practice emerged from a long and controversial process over some 60 years has been commended as exemplary in contrast to official attitudes, for example, those adopted by Japan in relation to the Pacific War or by Turkey in relation to the genocide of Armenians in 1915. Among the problems involved with such a practice remains a high degree of selectivity. This applies not least to the fact that remembrance of the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany obscures reference to German colonial practice, including in particular the first genocide of the 20th Century, committed by the German military in Namibia. A closer look at such selective processes leads to an intricate problem, frequently fraught with forms of a 'competition of victims' (Chaumont 1997).

NAMIBIA AND GERMAN MEMORY POLITICS

All efforts outlined above have focused exclusively on the consequences of Nazi rule and World War II in Europe, and on new identity constructions in Germany (see König 2008: 497–637). The former colonial sphere was not within the purview of the public mind in Germany. In spite of some academic research, there is a tendency to leave the colonial dimension out of public stock taking regarding Germany's history. In this way, important dimensions of that history are left out of the picture as far as these dimensions were acted out in the colonies.²⁵ This situation entails severe limitations to otherwise critical impulses associated with the process of public engagement with a tortuous history across a wide political spectrum. The need to revise the image of the past to include German colonial rule and colonial mass crimes has not yet been addressed. As the opening episode of this chapter has underlined, views and opinions lacking this essential perspective are widespread among political actors.

German memory politics after World War II was marked by postcolonial amnesia, even though events and conflicts in former German colonies, including the liberation struggle in Namibia, were certainly recognised in some quarters. Such issues kindled controversy and were taken up by the broad Anti-Apartheid Movement in West Germany. Yet even here, the specific, objectively postcolonial situation played a marginal role at best. Criticism was

²⁵ It is significant that in Germany, a pioneering book on the role and fates of the colonial sphere during World War II has appeared at the sidelines of academia, see Morgenrath & Rössel 2005; see further, ch. 3.

directed against the policy of the West German Government of continuing its support for German language schools in Namibia as well as for maintaining, up to 1977, a consulate in Windhoek, regardless of the illegal occupation by South Africa (Brenke 1989: 117, 119–25; Bassmann 1987). Both policies were seen as openly supporting the Apartheid regime and its illegal occupation of the mandated territory. Similarly, local groups objected to relations that existed between a German city like Bremen and German speaking associations in Namibia which applied for, and in most cases secured, financial support (H. Müller 1982:146–8).

At the same time, pockets of colonial nostalgia remained, and could rely on connections in high places. Thus, the ‘Association for the Tradition of Former Protection and Overseas Troops – Friends of the Former German Protectorates’,²⁶ founded in 1956, assembled veterans of the colonial wars. They worked, quite effectively, to safeguard existing colonial monuments and even to erect new ones. Today, at a time when no such veterans are still alive, the organisation works to keep alive colonial nostalgia, with right wing and nationalist overtones (see ch. 6). In the 1950s and 1960s, such groups found allies in the governing Christian Democratic Union (CDU), including Kai-Uwe von Hassel, who served as Minister President of the state of Schleswig-Holstein and went on to federal offices as Federal Minister of Defence and President of the Bundestag.

Memorials re-dedicated, streets re-named – initiatives for a postcolonial memory culture

As noted in chapter one, memorials and street names are important markers of public memory. Moreover, they figure in the everyday and act constantly, if inconspicuously, on the mind-sets of inhabitants or passersby. For such reasons, more recent postcolonial initiatives in many German cities and towns have taken up local vestiges of colonialism in order to raise awareness among citizens about the colonial past (see also ch. 12). This has come about after an involved and contradictory development which also marked solidarity work with liberation movements in southern Africa. The new initiatives throw into relief colonial amnesia – not in the sense of not knowing, but for various reasons, of not addressing. I map out below some of the attempts to tackle the problem of colonial amnesia.

In his studies on German colonial memorials, Joachim Zeller found that ‘iconoclasm in the immediate post-war period’ which led to the removal of some of these monuments ‘was carried out . . . for anti-fascist reasons and not as a result of anti-colonial feelings’ (2008: 238). During the student movement of the late 1960s there were attempts to take up themes connected with colonialism (Cornils 2011: 200–6; Zeller: 2000: 206–15). When the broad Anti-Apartheid Movement gained ground in West Germany during the mid-1970s, in various towns and cities, groups took up issues that were related to Namibia and German colonialism in general. Inevitably, such issues connected with the colonial past. Most conspicuously, the bronze eagle crowning the Göttingen *Südwest* monument –

²⁶ *Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen/Freunde der früheren deutschen Schutzgebiete (TSU)*; see <http://www.traditionsverband.de/>; also Zeller 2000: 229–37.

explicitly related to Namibia – was removed by unknown persons, and the head auctioned at a May 1st event in 1978 to raise funds in support of ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union); more than 20 years later, in 1999, the head was donated to the University of Namibia (UNAM) Student History Society and was intended for display in the lobby of UNAM Library (Zeller 2008b: 240). In Bremen, and elsewhere, there were campaigns to change the names of streets commemorating colonialists, such as Adolf Lüderitz (Litzba 1982) or Carl Peters, the colonialist *condottiere* who had fallen from grace, even in Wilhelminian Germany.

In this way, these initiatives formed part of a wider movement. In Berlin, the 'Peters-Allee' is a conspicuous case in point. The 'avenue' is situated at the fringe of the 'African Quarter', where streets are named systematically after African countries – not only erstwhile German colonies – as well as personages such as Adolf Lüderitz and places like Swakopmund. The name of Peters was added under the Nazis when they changed 'Londoner Strasse' into 'Petersallee', obviously to honour Carl Peters, known as a particularly ruthless coloniser in what is today mainland Tanzania. In the mid-1980s, the local authorities in Berlin chose to sidestep demands for renaming this road, by claiming that 'Peters' referred to an obscure local politician – an obvious ruse and falsification.²⁷ Years later, an initiative in Bochum was more successful, when activists prevailed on local authorities in 1998 to change officially the names of Peters, Wissmann and Lüderitz streets, although they did not succeed in getting the proposed alternative names.²⁸ Significantly, the street names proposed by the activists made little reference to German colonialism or to resistance fighters in former German colonies, but rather to the current liberation struggles in southern Africa. Thus, proposals favoured Nelson Mandela, Albert Luthuli or Dulcie September. Such suggestions also bespoke a low level of knowledge about and engagement with German colonial history which seemed less important than apartheid rule.

There were also efforts to change the meaning of monuments. During the 1980s, the local activist group AKAARIK (Working Group Africa) in Münster campaigned for adding a plaque to one of the town's numerous war memorials, which also refers to the campaigns in Namibia. The tablet had already been produced and the inscription read: 'We remember the victims of the genocide committed under German colonial rule in Namibia' (Zeller 2008b: 240, 242). The campaign was not successful. The Münster Town Council, which had the last say, objected to the term 'genocide'. Ruprecht Polenz, then Christian Democratic majority leader in the city council, stated at a panel discussion that he feared reference to genocide in Namibia would 'relativise what we [Germans] have done to the Jews'.²⁹ In this way, not so much victim competition was taken up but rather a fear that addressing colonial genocide might somehow desecrate the singularity of the Holocaust by countenancing the

27 See <http://www.koloniale-spuren.de/> (accessed 23.5.2012); van der Heyden 2002: 262–3. Peters was notorious for his violent excesses perpetrated in East Africa (Tanzania).

28 Interview with one of the local anti-Apartheid veterans, Marie-Luise Bartz, Bochum 21.2.2011 (NAN AACRLS.304); <http://www.freedom-roads.de/frd/umbenenn.htm> (accessed 22.2.2011).

29 Personal observation, 29.8.1985; see also Kössler & Melber 2004: 39–40; Polenz went on to become General Secretary of the CDU for a few months in 2000; from 2005 to 2013, he was Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Bundestag.

fact that other genocides had occurred in the 20th Century and even been perpetrated by Germans. As Zeller (2008b: 241) states, for some years the foray in Münster stood out as a singular initiative. Elsewhere, even when allusions were made that referred to a 'shared history', this connection was debated much more in terms of the immediate struggles in the present than with reference to the mediated presence of the struggles of the past.³⁰ On the other hand, those who vehemently supported the apartheid regime's occupation of Namibia and its plans for unilateral independence pointed much more to the ostensible danger of a Soviet takeover than rehearsing the colonial past (see the documentation in Melber et al. 1984: 149–78). The pervasive colonial amnesia amongst different quarters in the West German public can be considered to be a corollary of these mutually opposing attitudes.³¹

It may be argued that such postcolonial amnesia is still prevalent in Germany today, even if there are shifts, as reflected by literary production on the one hand (Göttsche 2013) and by a tendency in popular culture on the other hand to transpose dramatic and sentimental fiction or film to the erstwhile colonies or generally, to 'Africa', where then decidedly German stories are played out (Struck 2011 a, b). Such images may even attest to a widespread isolation from the grim realities of colonialism which is transposed into rather harmless images combining adventure and romance. Still, from the late 1980s onwards, some change can be observed, even though it would probably be an exaggeration to call this 'a decolonisation of the public sphere in Germany' (Zeller 2007: 271). Zeller (2007: 270) lists six cases where colonial monuments were rededicated, usually by adding plaques with appropriate texts, to change their message into a critique of colonialism and regret for its victims. In the most conspicuous case, the erstwhile German Colonial Memorial in Bremen was rededicated in several steps (see Zeller 2008b: 241–3, 2000: 221–5). The memorial had been erected in 1932, after spirited and controversial debate in the parliament of the city-state. It has the form of a huge brick structure representing an elephant (Zeller 2000: 153–5). In 1988, the local chapter of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAB) topped years of campaigning by unofficially naming the elephant an 'anti-colonial mark for reflection' (*Anti-Kolonial-Denk-Mal*), shortly after the youth group of the metal workers' union placed a plaque in front of the monument to protest Apartheid (Zeller 2000: 224, fn. 534).

Official re-dedication came in 1990, when a stone was placed in front of the elephant with an inscription that repudiates colonialism and stresses the need for solidarity with the struggle for self-determination and against 'colonialism, racism and continuing exploitation' (Zeller 2000: 242). In 1996 an additional plaque was installed which is dedicated to the 'victims of German colonial rule in Namibia 1884–1914' (Zeller 2000: 225). This plaque was unveiled in the presence of Namibian President Sam Nujoma, on the occasion of his state visit to Germany.

30 Round Table 1982; the same discursive situation is reflected in the *Bundestag* draft resolution of the Green party of 1989 referred to below.

31 This is also borne out by the account of West German diplomacy concerning Namibia during the 1970s and 80s by then Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (2014).

Fig. 2.1 The Bremen elephant, German colonial memorial built out of brick in 1932. Photograph from the collection of Joachim Zeller.



Fig. 2.2 Re-dedication of the Bremen elephant, 2009, 'To the memory of the victims of the Genocide of 1904–1908 in Namibia, and of the Battle of Ohamakari. Dedicated on 11 August, 2009.' In the foreground are rocks from the Waterberg, assembled by Namibian farmer Heiner Schneider-Waterberg. The Honorary Consul of Namibia in Bremen and Hamburg, Klaus Thesenfitz, financed the cost of transporting the rocks to Bremen (Hilleges & Hinz n.d.). Photograph: Heiko Wegmann.





FIG. 2.3 Commemoration at the renamed 'Hererostraße', formerly 'Lothar von Trothastraße' in Munich-Trudering, October 20, 2013. Namibian delegate Ida Hoffmann and Gülseren Demirel, chairperson of the Green faction in the Munich city council, hold up a suggested alternative street sign for another colonially named street in this area of Munich. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

In such ways, colonial amnesia was punctured, but not effectively overcome. Even the renaming of streets remains a difficult exercise. Thus, after long years of campaigning and litigation, the street in a Munich suburb that had been named in honour of Lothar von Trotha, the commanding general during the genocide in Namibia, was renamed 'Hererostraße' on the highly symbolic date November 9, 2007.³² The plethora of street names in this area which was established as a 'colonial quarter' in the early 1930s, testifies to the long road ahead if a 'postcolonial' situation is to be created merely on the level of street names.³³

The decision by the Munich City Council already had been communicated more than a year before (*TN*, 9.10.2006), and did not elicit enthusiasm in Namibia. There were voices

³² Lindner 2007: 297–9. November 9 marks the dates of the rising of sailors in Kiel in 1918, that ushered in the revolution to end World War I and to remove the monarchy; an abortive Nazi *putsch* in Munich in 1923; the countrywide anti-Jewish *pogrom* in 1938 (*Reichspogromnacht*); and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

³³ I had an opportunity to speak to some of the local activists who are campaigning for re-naming the streets during a commemoration on the spot on October 20, 2013.

that took exception to the phrase 'Herero Street' instead of 'Ovaherero Street' which would have been the correct form. People who were asked their opinion on the matter all agreed that the re-naming had been a blunder and that the correct way would have been to refer this to the elders (Kössler 2008a: 332–3). This episode underlines once again the difficulties of communication even in a situation which might be expected to work towards joining like-minded groups. Moreover, the campaigning of people in Munich turned out still to be tinged by their hegemonic position vis-à-vis Namibia and Namibians: Not only were they in a position to go ahead and eventually effect what they believed was right, it did not even occur to them to begin a consultation process with Namibians, on top of the difficult squabbles at hand in Munich local politics. Still, while this episode shows some of the difficulties of agreeing on a common purpose, namely recognition of past wrongs and reconciliation, official German policy has shown much more stubbornness by stonewalling a meaningful way of recognising the wrongs of German colonialism. It is to the official German approach to independent Namibia we now turn, as far as issues of memory politics are concerned.

A 'special responsibility'

Under the circumstances just described, it could not be expected that Namibia would attract intense attention within the overall process of German memory politics and commemoration practice. Arguably, from a Namibian perspective, only in 1990 did independence actually set the scene for seriously addressing the issues of Namibian–German entangled history (Katjavivi 2010). Before 1990, the prolonged independence conflict, which was enmeshed inextricably with the illegal occupation of Namibia by Apartheid South Africa and with the issues around Apartheid itself, had obliterated these issues. As a consequence of the swiftly changing constellation in world politics, quite different considerations were at the top of the German agenda at the time: the collapse of the East German regime and the precipitous process of unification. These events were immediately followed by the implosion of the Soviet Bloc. Especially the demise of the GDR created a new situation in German memory politics, since now there were persistent demands that the mistakes and shortcomings that had been committed after 1945 should not be repeated after the end of the 'second German dictatorship'. Such preoccupations did not create a very propitious climate for taking up issues connected with an almost forgotten or repressed colonial past.³⁴

Still, upon the accession of Namibia to independence, the German state obviously had to face its colonial heritage in one way or other. Above all, it has been official policy of the (West) German Government from its inception in 1949 that the (West) German state³⁵ is the legal successor of the Empire as founded in 1871. Constructions of 'guilt' for state sponsored

34 By coincidence, the fall of the Berlin Wall completely diverted public attention in Germany from the Namibian independence process and the elections that were just getting underway.

35 It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to address here the position of the GDR or its stance on colonialism and solidarity with national liberation movements (Schleicher & Schleicher 1998); more recently, Schilling 2014: 90–154 *passim* refers at length to East German references to the colonial past and erstwhile colonies.

crimes are precarious, and in the case of the much debated ‘collective guilt’ of Germans on account of the Holocaust, this has been shown to rest mainly on a specific application of ‘German power for invention’ (Frei 2005: 145), in fact a ruse to deflect any pressures towards taking up historic responsibility.³⁶ In terms of a seminal and early intervention on the subject, such responsibility can still be termed ‘political guilt’, which does not imply personal guilt but certainly means that ‘we are collectively accountable’ – even if this covers persons, like the author of the quoted text, who had been adversaries of the Nazis (Jaspers 1946: 39). Furthermore, the official claim to succession to a legal position should also include responsibility for the attendant liabilities. Inevitably these include war crimes perpetrated in the name of the state – in the Namibian case, of Wilhelminian Germany.

Quite in keeping with the implications of changes in the possibilities of addressing the dire colonial past, official West German politics turned to future relations with Namibia at a point when independence was within reach. Early in 1989, specifically on March 15, immediately before the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) process was to move into its decisive phase on April 1, the *Bundestag* passed a motion on Namibia. Up to the present, this resolution is regularly invoked in official German statements to characterise the relationship between the two countries. The standard reference is that here, the German Parliament acknowledged a ‘special responsibility’ for the former German colony (see also chapters 10 & 12). A reading of the text with some two and a half decades of hindsight reveals that this ‘special responsibility’ is not motivated in any way in the resolution. Rather, the resolution refers mainly to issues connected to the impending transition process and the role of the West German Government in that process. The ‘special responsibility’ appears only in the three line preamble: ‘Noting the independence process of Namibia which begins on April 1, 1989 and the special responsibility of the Federal Republic of Germany for that country and its citizens’. Among the eight policy items that follow, item (2) insists on a continued financial responsibility of South Africa, item (4) provides for possible assistance in constitution writing, item (5) admonishes the Federal Government specifically to work for safeguarding human rights, the rule of law and a free polity in independent Namibia and item (8) calls for a constructive role of the ‘German speaking minority’ in Namibia and assures them of continued cultural support by the *Bundestag*.³⁷

The wording ‘special responsibility’ was widely seen as a somewhat coy admission of guilt linked to the record of colonial rule in the country some 80–90 years before, or otherwise a ‘euphemistic denial’ of the genocide that had become the central event to characterise this rule (Melber 2008: 265). When one looks at the competing texts submitted by the Social Democrats and the Greens, who were in opposition at the time, as well as at the original draft motion submitted by the coalition parties, the Conservatives (CDU/CSU) and Liberals (FDP), the curt formula in the final resolution appears to be the product of a compromise. This includes an apparent resolve not to say anything about the literal ‘skeletons in the

36 This long debate notwithstanding, undifferentiated reference to ‘guilt’ can be found in influential scholarship, e.g. A. Assmann 2013.

37 *Deutscher Bundestag, 11. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 11/4205, 15.3.1989.*

cupboard' which all participants in the process were obviously aware of – since they were mentioned in the draft resolutions by SPD and Greens. In fact, the main differences that existed between the three draft resolutions treated in committee consisted precisely in the divergent reasons given for a 'special responsibility'. The lists of measures proposed for government action during the UNTAG process formed the bulk of all the texts, but apparently were uncontroversial.

The SPD draft resolution contained a motivation for 'special responsibility' based on three points: First, German colonial rule, when the 'German Empire . . . during the colonial war of 1904 to 1907 exterminated more than a quarter of the Herero tribe, murdered tens of thousands of Nama and totally subjugated the survivors'; the two further reasons given for a 'special responsibility' were the FRG's role in the contact group to implement UN Security Council Resolution 435 and the consular representation of 'Germans living in Namibia' 'during the illegal occupation of Namibia by the Republic South Africa'.³⁸ The draft resolution of the Greens referred briefly to German colonial rule and placed more emphasis on the FRG's collaboration with the illegal South African regime as reasons for an 'elevated degree of responsibility'.³⁹ Significantly, the draft resolution of the governing coalition of conservatives (CDU/CSU) and liberals (FDP) also clearly gave more extensive reasons for the 'special responsibility'. They mentioned the role of the Federal Government in the contact group, former German colonial rule without giving any detail, and the presence in Namibia of 'a considerable minority of Germans or of persons of German descent'.⁴⁰

All in all then, taking the views of the parties represented in the *Bundestag*, the 'special responsibility' rested on four grounds that were partly complementary, but in part also hard to reconcile or clearly unpalatable to the majority: Pointers to former German colonial rule could go along with the presence of a 'German' minority as long as the genocide was left out of the account; the genocide, mentioned only by the SPD – even though in a different wording – sat uneasily with reference to a settler community whose structural basis had been laid by this particular way of clearing the land for white settlement; the collaboration with South Africa, was a liability of all parties that had been in government at one time or the other since 1949, which in 1989 meant all except for the Greens. The ingenious solution was obviously not to mention any of the reasons but simply state the 'special responsibility' point blank. It is in the light of this background history that the constant reference to this resolution up to the present should be evaluated.

A further dimension of the 'special relationship' emerges from early (West) German hopes to become 'a sort of *primus inter pares*' with respect to Namibia. In his retrospective, the first (West) German envoy to Windhoek⁴¹ motivated this by 'various achievements in various epochs of the past', earlier co-operation and the weight of 'Germans' (i.e. German speakers) in Namibia (Ganns 2002: 85). It is obvious that Namibia stands out in this way

38 *Deutscher Bundestag*, 11. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 11/3996, 15.2.1989.

39 *Deutscher Bundestag*, 11. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 11/4039, 21.2.1989.

40 *Deutscher Bundestag*, 11. Wahlperiode, Drucksache 11/3934, 30.1.1989.

41 Up to Unification on October 3, 1990, Ambassador of West Germany, thereafter of the unified state.

in relation to other former German colonies. On official websites of the German foreign office, references to the past of other former German colonies differ clearly from the much more extensive wording in the summary on Namibia, which stands out since the 'special responsibility' is mentioned. Claims that the linkage fostered by colonialism or 'protective rule' (*Schutzherrschaft*) are conducive for present-day relationships, which appear in texts on some other former German colonies, are distinctly missing from the one dealing with Namibia.⁴² However, the Foreign Office text on bilateral relations between the two countries wrongly claims that the seminal speech by Minister Wiczorek-Zeul on August 14, 2004, at the centennial commemoration of the battle of Ohamakarri and the ensuing genocide (see ch. 11), was related to the 'beginning of the colonial war'.⁴³ One may argue whether the Namibian War began on October 25, 1903 and January 11, 1904, but certainly not in August of that year. The text posted by the Foreign Office thus reveals a pervasive effort to avoid the issue of genocide in relation to Namibia – or otherwise, remarkable negligence on the part of official German diplomacy.

Still, as became clear during the first decade of Namibian independence, consecutive German governments considered it adequate to honour the 'special relationship' by making Namibia the largest per capita recipient of German ODA (Katjavivi 2014: 148–9). German officials showed little inclination to listen to the entreaties of victim groups when visiting Namibia. Such curt treatment eventually set the scene for the lawsuit by Ovaherero in the U.S.A. (see ch. 10) as well as further initiatives of affected groups up to the present.

Consecutive German governments also followed a staid and restrictive course when it came to anything approaching openly naming what had happened in Namibia in 1904–08 (see ch. 12). A studied avoidance even of using the word 'genocide' in official discourse continued after the change of government in Germany in 1998. Similarly, a recent publicity flyer of the German Embassy in Windhoek addresses 'Historical Responsibility', but 'hardly reveals what this responsibility refers to'.⁴⁴

Any different approach would amount to a sea-change – a fundamental turn towards a policy of active remembrance directed at Germany's colonial past, in similar ways as evolved over the decades following the end of World War II with respect to the Holocaust. As we

42 http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/01-Nodes/Namibia_node.html.
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Namibia/Bilateral.html>.
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Kamerun/Bilateral.html>.
http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_3766CCDD87C33E25978379B084769D13/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Mikronesien/Bilateral.html.
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Palau/Bilateral.html>.
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/PapuaNeuguinea/Bilateral.html>.
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Samoa/Bilateral.html>.
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Tansania/Bilateral.html>.
<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Togo/Bilateral.html>.
 (all accessed 16.12.2012; reviewed, 8.7.2014); note that only for Namibia an English version is provided.

43 <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Laenderinfos/Namibia/Bilateral.html> (8.7.2014).

44 Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Windhoek, Historical Responsibility. German Development Cooperation with Namibia. Information flyer. Windhoek 2011 (as quoted in Rampke 2012: 12).

have seen, this involved a prolonged, halting process and specific circumstances. It was only through determined struggle by groups and individuals that a situation has prevailed since the late 1990s, where remembrance of 'Auschwitz' arguably forms part of the foundational myth of the German state – although this does not remain uncontested.

It is obvious that when it comes to the heritage of colonialism, public memory is more easily repressed in Germany than is the case with Nazi crimes. This is certainly due to the longer distance of time that separates the present from active German colonial practice. The colonial wars and in particular the genocide in Namibia had impacts on German domestic policy of the time, and as I shall argue in the following chapter, also on some aspects of public mentality, and they wrought a major upheaval in the constellation of political parties. However, all of this was at no time associated with anything that can be likened to the political and moral cataclysm of 1945. On the contrary, military campaigns were victorious and for decades after were celebrated as such. Given this basic constellation, it is clear that those who work towards anchoring the colonial past within the awareness of Germans at large about their history face a tough uphill struggle. Given the specific constellation that continues to shape German memory politics, not least when it comes to side-lining its colonial accountability, it is in order to look in more detail at the relationship that exists, in historical process and also in its discursive representations, between the genocide of 1904–8 in Namibia and the Holocaust.

3

The First Genocide of the 20th Century and the Holocaust: Structural Parallels – Discursive Continuities?

CHALLENGES IN MEMORY POLITICS

THE YEAR 1884 MARKS A TURNING POINT IN AFRICAN HISTORY, THE BERLIN CONFERENCE. It also signals the onset of the formal colonisation of what was to become German South West Africa, today Namibia. Much less attention has been given to the consequences such colonial engagement had for Germany herself. According to recent analysis, the swift, if limited, colonial expansion of the Empire that followed, mainly in Africa, amounted to a fundamental change in the 'Empire's political character', its turn towards expansionism (Pogge von Strandmann 2009: 28). The discursive break or shift towards an ever more radicalising nationalism, discussed in the preceding chapter, is closely related to this turn. By 1945, relentless and ruthless expansionism had ended in a military, political and above all, moral catastrophe. This cataclysm contributed to a kind of colonial amnesia which contrasted with the vacillating but still highly visible engagement of official (West) Germany with the consequences of Nazi rule and in particular, with the Holocaust. Naturally, Namibian perspectives were quite different from those articulated in Germany and brought out clearly the idea of a connection specifically between the colonial genocide perpetrated in Namibia from 1904–08 and the mass crimes committed some four decades later in occupied Europe as well as in Germany proper.

I would like to include just three examples of the kind of connection that is made time and again, in diverse ways, by Namibians.

1. In the submission of the lawsuit filed by the Herero People Reparations Corporation (HPRC) in the United States of America under the Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA), and pursued now for more than a decade against a number of German business firms, it is stated that the defendants, 'in a brutal alliance with Imperial Germany, relentlessly pursued the enslavement and the genocidal destruction of the Herero Tribe in Southwest Africa, now Namibia. *Foreshadowing with chilling precision the irredeemable horror of the European Holocaust* only decades later, the defendants and Imperial Germany formed a German commercial enterprise which cold-bloodedly employed explicitly-sanctioned extermination, the destruction of tribal culture and social organization, concentration camps, forced labour, medical experimentation and the exploitation of women and children in order to advance their common financial interests' (HPRC 2001: 21, emphasis added).
2. At the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban in 2001, Theo-Ben Gurirab, then Namibian Foreign Minister and one of the most prominent African diplomats, stated that 'Germany has apologised for crimes to Israel, Russia and Poland, because here whites were concerned. We are blacks, and if there should be a problem with an apology on this account, this would amount to racism'.¹
3. Late in September 2011, a public panel discussion was held in Berlin on occasion of the first instance of repatriation of human remains from Germany to Namibia. Festus Muundjua, one of the Namibians on the panel, objected to the reason the German Government had given for not talking directly to the victim groups, including the large Namibian delegation then present in Berlin, on account of the fact they were non-state actors. He pointed out that the German Government had also negotiated with the Jewish Claims Conference about redress for the Holocaust, even though this is a non-state body as well. By implication, this should also apply to the Namibian case.²

There is diversity and even some potential tension in the statements above. Gurirab's indictment resonates with incisive arguments and pleas which had been raised for a long time by representatives of PanAfricanism and Négritude. These authors had pointed out that the shock and abhorrence against Nazi mass crimes was related to the fact that these crimes were perpetrated against Europeans. These submissions stressed that comparable horrors had gone quite unnoticed by the western public as long as the carnage took place in the colonies and the victims were blacks.³ In this way, there is good reason to sever the problematic from the concrete context of entangled national histories, in order to address an overarching nexus between colonialism and modern barbarism.

1 As quoted in Veit (2001), translated from the German report by the author; a similar statement by then SWAPO Secretary General Hifikipunye Pohamba is quoted in AZ, 16.8.2001.

2 Personal observation, Berlin, 28.9.2011; interview with Festus Muundjua, Windhoek, March 2012.

3 See DuBois 1947: 23; Césaire 1950; Hannah Arendt 1951 is also often mentioned in this connection, but see the critical reappraisal of her position by Moses 2011; more recently, see e.g. K.E. Müller 2012: 92. Nevertheless, Arendt certainly was quite influential in putting forth such arguments.

From a different perspective, the Holocaust has been set within a perspective of overarching modernity. In this view the related principles of control, in the sense of the 'gardening state', that prunes everything not deemed suitable, and race science with its quest for selective breeding and eliminating unwanted strains, coalesced in the planned and purposeful mass destruction of human life on a grand scale.⁴

On the other hand, the quoted statements by OvaHerero focus on the concrete occasion, without of course blocking further generalisation. It is quite possible, then, to see both perspectives as complementary approaches to arrive at a constructive position.

Still, such statements and the obviously very different approach taken by a majority in the German public and many German scholars warrant more in-depth treatment. For this, I shall review some of the current approaches to the problem, including existing controversy and debate. It is my aim that this will lead, through a number of steps, to some clarification, to which will be added some thoughts on the modes and effects of public communication on the genocide in Namibia, as transpired in Germany during the first half of the 20th Century.

PITFALLS OF DIRECT CONTINUITY CLAIMS

Recently, some popular work on the supposed close linkage between the genocide in Namibia and the Holocaust has met considerable and positive response in southern Africa. In many quarters, this is seen as a positive contribution in itself, since it no doubt helps to draw public attention to the issue. However, there are also some serious problems. This work employs mainly anecdotal connection and circumstantial evidence to underpin claims about the very direct and tight relationship that is claimed to exist between the genocide in Namibia and the Holocaust. Both processes are presented as almost identical. This perspective is brought out rather starkly in the book title, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* (Olusoga & Erichsen 2009). Elsewhere, an elaborate attempt is made to prove the unmediated and personal responsibility of Emperor William II, who supposedly instructed General von Trotha personally, giving him an oral and secret order before sending him off to Namibia (Sarkin 2011). Since no documentary evidence can be adduced to substantiate such a claim, this argument appears spurious (Kössler 2012a).

Strong assertions of direct continuities between the genocide of 1904–08 and the Holocaust rest on a very shaky foundation. It is well known that Franz Xaver Epp,⁵ who served under Trotha in Namibia, later went on to become one of the central figures of the right wing militia (*Freikorps*) movement after World War I and an early supporter as well as a member of the Nazi party. Eventually, Epp became the chief of the Imperial Colonial Office (*Reichskolonialamt*) and a most prominent exponent of Nazi colonial aspirations. Furthermore, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck (Schulte-Vahrendorff 2006, Michels 2008) served

4 Bauman 1991: ch. 1; also Gasman 1971; Chorover 1979: ch. 5; of course, these issues dovetail with the consequences of race science dealt with at the beginning of ch. 12 below.

5 Later called Franz Xaver Ritter von Epp; see <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz52901.html> (10.7.2014).

in Namibia before he emerged as the military leader in the long-lasting campaign in Eastern Africa during World War I. This venture cost many thousands of African lives, and Lettow-Vorbeck was acclaimed as a hero in Germany after he actually had capitulated *following* the official date of armistice in 1918. Arguably, he turned his routine of ruthlessness against revolting workers in Hamburg ('*Sülze-Aufstand*') a few months later, but he was involved with the Nazis themselves only in a marginal way. After the re-armament of West Germany in the 1950s, barracks and streets were named after Lettow-Vorbeck. Campaigns to change this are still on-going or were successful only recently.⁶ Add to this the story about the brown fabric that had been left over from manufacturing *Schutztruppe* uniforms being utilised for the first brown shirts of Nazi members. This (not quite substantiated) evidence may be highly evocative on a symbolic level, but will hardly stand up to critics who point to the low numbers of men who actually were involved in the colonial war and also effectively participated in the Nazi apparatus and army. Moreover, the intervening period of 40 years between the Namibian War and the perpetration of the Holocaust implies that many of those active in Namibia would have been way beyond retiring age by the 1930s, or would have been in very junior positions during the beginning years of the 20th Century (Gerwarth & Malinowski 2007: 451–2).

Such counter-arguments should caution against constructing too rash and superficial connections. Serious claims about 'direct lines of continuity' (Goeschel & Wachsmann 2013: 281) leading from 'Windhoek to Nuremberg' or 'to Auschwitz' would presuppose an abundance of sources, besides a simplicity of process, that would be hard to find in the real world. To argue with the absence of such 'direct lines' may therefore appear to be an easy immunising strategy that excuses researchers from looking for more complex and mediated connections.

There is a more systematic and overarching problem involved as well. It relates to the widely discussed issue of German exceptionalism (*Sonderweg*) on the one hand and the potential for violence inherent in modernity on the other.⁷ Referring specifically to the genocide in Namibia, the latter perspective has been thrown into profile by Jürgen Zimmerer (2011: 17) who calls for a 'global history of mass violence'. Such a concept would clearly transcend narratives bound by the perspective of the nation state, while at the same time doing justice to particular cases. This perspective can also take into account structural commonalities that link particular colonial genocides, which are seen to flow from the logic of settler colonialism, to the Holocaust and the related German quest for colonising great parts of Eastern Europe. As we shall see, this still leaves open a number of questions which will be pursued below following a brief exposition of the approach.

6 For example, <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/1998-Moehle-Lettow.htm> (18.2.2014); <http://offene-kartierung.de/wiki/go?DerSogenannteTansaniaPark> (18.2.2014); <http://www.haz.de/Hannover/Aus-der-Stadt/Uebersicht/Lettow-Vorbeck-Allee-in-Hannover-darf-umbenannt-werden> (18.2.2014); [http://www.saarlouis.de/rathaus/presse-pressearchiv/info/artikel/zwei-namen-fuer-die-von-lettow-vorbeck-strasse/?tx_rggooglemap_pi1\[poi\]=46&cHash=bdcf10bd8ca681eb0739b9730a6bc752](http://www.saarlouis.de/rathaus/presse-pressearchiv/info/artikel/zwei-namen-fuer-die-von-lettow-vorbeck-strasse/?tx_rggooglemap_pi1[poi]=46&cHash=bdcf10bd8ca681eb0739b9730a6bc752) (18.2.2014).

7 One of the main authors along such lines of thought is Zygmunt Bauman (1989, 1991). Significantly, this perspective is absent from a recent attempt to contextualise the murder of European Jewry in a diachronic as well as synchronic perspective (see Pohl 2012).

SETTLER COLONIALISM, GENOCIDE AND THE HOLOCAUST

Inasmuch as this approach transcends the limits of the nation state container (Anthony Giddens), it also differs appreciably from earlier debates on the genocide in Namibia. These were mostly restricted to Namibia specialists and revolved around factual arguments related to the actual number of victims. In difficult ways, such arguments were enmeshed in a quest to salvage a view of African agency and a concern for the ownership of national history.⁸ More recently, academic debate has no longer disputed facts but rather revolved around their meaning and interpretation. Victim numbers and the occurrence of large-scale atrocity still leave room for debating whether the term 'genocide' makes sense at all, and whether an intention to annihilate African groups can be traced back to an early stage or if it emerged later on.⁹

In terms of the notion set forth by Raphael Lemkin (1944: ch. IX; cf. Moses 2012), who coined the term, or in the UN convention, it is hard to contest arguments that categorise the events in Namibia as genocide. Here, the figures of victims that resulted not only from the fighting alone, but from inhuman treatment in concentration camps as well, weigh heavily, but they do not tell the whole story. More importantly, Trotha's two proclamations, directed to the Ovaherero in October 1904 and to the Nama in April 1905, can hardly be understood other than conveying the express intention to eliminate the two groups from the confines of the German colony. Furthermore, the Native Ordinances of 1906–07 rounded off the genocidal strategy by measures designed to prevent the reconstruction of communal nexuses, as well as economic recovery and autonomy. These ends were served by the restrictions on ownership of large stock and settling in larger than minute groups; the economic rationale was served by the obligation to work and the bureaucratic means of control by a prototype of the pass system (*Dienstbuch*). In terms of settler colonialism, however, the most decisive measure was the wholesale expropriation of African land (Zimmerer 2001: 68–94).

In terms of analytical concepts as well as the rationale pursued on the ground, there can be little doubt that in intentionality as well as intensity of action, what happened in 1904–08 amounted to genocide, according to the UN Convention. More recent argument concerns more fine grained matters. Thus, debate revolves around the question of whether Trotha pursued the 'racial struggle' (as quoted in Drechsler 1966: 161) which he proclaimed right from the beginning, or if he was driven into this course of action after his original design of a decisive battle had failed at Ohamakarari; in this case, specific features of the German military, such as a fixation on decisive battles like that attempted at Ohamakarari, or a systemic weakness in logistics, are given considerable importance by analysts (Kuss 2010; Hull 2003, 2005). Other issues concern the ethnographic registers that informed colonial administrators and may have made them prone to murderous action specifically against the Ovaherero

⁸ See esp. Lau 1995b; Dederling 1993; Krüger 2003: 128; the best analysis is Hillebrecht (2007); see ch. 5.

⁹ For strong versions of the intentionalist argument over genocide, along the lines of 'modern premeditated genocide' (Fein 1979: 8), this is of considerable relevance. In the Namibian case, pronouncements by Trotha are often set against reconstructions of an unfolding logic of genocide. However, this does not seriously question what happened in 1904–08 (see also ch. 5).

(Steinmetz 2007: 124–139), or a possible difference between the more ‘bourgeois’ Leutwein and his successor Trotha, harking from nobility, who might have favoured a more militaristic strategy, aimed at the annihilation of the enemy (Steinmetz 2005). It is noteworthy that authors who do not agree with the classification of what happened in Namibia as genocide do not question that the *Schutztruppe* committed acts that ‘also according to the legal opinion of the day were very serious war crimes’ (Barth 2006: 132).

Disagreement and heated controversy continue around considerations examining what happened after the colonial genocide.¹⁰ Here, the atrocities committed by German troops following their advance through Belgium in 1914 play a certain role when they are seen as a consequence of a specific strategic and tactical set-up that also had informed military strategy in Namibia a decade before (Hull 2005: 209–11). The titles of contributions written even from opposing perspectives underline the main thrust of the debate: whether ‘paths’ can be identified that lead from ‘the Herero to the Holocaust’ (Kundrus 2005) or again, from ‘Windhuk to Auschwitz’ (Zimmerer 2011), or from ‘Windhoek to Nuremberg’ (Kundrus 2003a). Such paths are possible connections between the discrimination against ‘mixed marriages’ and children of ‘mixed parentage’, which became rampant in Namibia from about 1900 onward¹¹, and the Nuremberg laws of 1936 which provided for similar discrimination against Jews, as an important step on the road to total extermination. Similarly, connections are intimated between the strategy and practice of annihilation pursued by the *Schutztruppe* and the colonial administration on the one hand, and the industrial mass extermination executed by the Nazis during the early 1940s on the other.

Importantly, this does not mean that these various policies and crimes are equated. Thus, Jürgen Zimmerer underlines obvious differences between what happened in Namibia and what happened later in occupied Eastern Europe. These differences refer, for instance, to the efficiency and density of the organised state (Zimmerer 2011: 276). However, the debate has demonstrated that assertion of connections and refutation of such links can have diverse implications. As we have seen, the argument about exaggerated claims of direct links and continuities can backfire in the sense that through its flaws, such reasoning may inadvertently immunise counter-arguments. Above all, actual attempts to propose such connections fail when limiting the perspective to personal linkages. In this way, they remain on the paltry level of anecdotal statements. At the same time, one or several ‘theses of continuity’ are repeatedly referred to in authoritative writing,¹² or it is claimed that ‘some academics . . . sought the origins of Nazism in colonial wars at the beginning of the twentieth century’ (Schilling 2014: 4). However, such a proposition is in fact not defended in serious scholarship.¹³ The routine destruction of such fictitious argument therefore does

10 Note the strong assertion of continuity between what happened in Namibia (and other colonies) in regard to ‘race science’ and the procurement of human remains (Zimmerman 2001: 242–4, see ch. 12).

11 cf. Henrichsen (2008); Hartmann (2004); Roller (2004).

12 Gründer 2012: 15; see also Langbehn & Salama (2011: xi); Pohl (2012) emphasises repeatedly the faint traces of such continuity.

13 See the almost routine disclaimer by Zimmerer (2013: 55), the academic author most frequently associated with such views.

little justice to the seriousness of the matter and detracts from the necessary engagement with the substantive arguments.

To contribute more towards the discussion, we turn to issues of parallels in strategic aims and connected practices of domination and administration that can be found in otherwise undoubtedly different historical situations. Such parallels have been vehemently and forcefully asserted in particular by Jürgen Zimmerer (2011).¹⁴ In this reasoning, continuity flows out of the inherent tendency of the settler colonialist project to eliminate the colonised physically besides appropriating their assets, above all, their land. Even though this may not be an inevitable consequence of such projects, settler colonialism still follows a powerful logic that has, in many cases, produced genocidal consequences. Namibia, on account of its climatic conditions and its limited potential for a free range livestock economy, held a specific position among German colonies. It is spurious to claim that it was the most coveted one (see Sarkin 2011), but it did offer at least some potential to receive immigrants. As we have seen, this perspective had been pursued by the German national movement throughout the 19th Century in the form of diverse and mostly phantasmagoric projects.¹⁵ In the longer run, this quest was predicated on 'the myth of Germans as superior colonizers', which even outlived a 'discourse of colonial advocates' that 'in the 1880s and 90s . . . dropped all moral pretenses' (Zantop 1997: 202–3). In this way, such fantasies still informed colonial revisionism after 1918–19. One may also speculate about whether it was precisely on account of the phantasmagoric slant of much of German colonialism that settlement in Namibia took on an importance that exceeded its rather limited population size and its lack of practical importance for the metropole.

After the termination of merely 30 years of real German colonial rule, the quest for land and settlement crystallised in the emblematic trope of 'a people without space' (*Volk ohne Raum*). As has already been mentioned, the appropriation of African lands, as well as cattle, was a central, long-term objective for Governor Leutwein, in spite of the criticism he drew from settlers for being too conciliatory and prone to compromise. In this way, the strategy concerning land expropriation constituted one of the central strategic commonalities shared by German actors regardless of their otherwise heated controversies, which included Leutwein's and Rohrbach's argument for sparing Africans as a future labour force, in contradistinction to Trotha's exterminatory approach (Zimmerer 2001: 28, 56ff).

Zimmerer (2011) also takes up the point that the formal German colonies always remained marginal in economic as well as demographic terms; however, the main perspective for colonial expansion pursued by the German Empire, in particular during both World Wars, had its thrust towards eastern and south-eastern Europe. Both large-scale settlement strategies – one reaching out from the Prussian eastern provinces into extensive regions to the east and southeast and one to an overseas colonial sphere – were closely intertwined (Bley

14 The incisive and far reaching exploration into parallels and continuities between colonialism, Nazism and beyond by Wiebke Keim (2014) came to my attention only after the completion of the manuscript for this book.

15 See also Gründer 1999: ch. 2, 2012: 19–25, ch.2; Fenske 1991.

2003: 59). During phases when extensive regions in Eastern Europe were effectively occupied by the German military, during both world wars in 1917–18 and again in 1939–44, planning got under way for radical colonial ‘landgrabbing’. Especially during World War II, such plans or goals were put into practice in important ways. To achieve these goals, resources were redirected, including capacities in the fields of colonial economy and administration, which had been nurtured in terms of a perspective of colonial revisionism. These personnel and administrative structures were now rededicated for use in occupied Poland, which was cast into the role of an ‘adjoining colony’ (Conrad 2008: 97–100). After the decisive defeat of the German army at Stalingrad in early 1943, these personnel and institutional resources were conclusively diverted from any colonial designs in Africa that had been pursued previously (Linne 2008: 70–2, 147–9).

From this vantage point, personal and institutional continuities take on more importance.¹⁶ As mentioned above, such connections pertained to a limited group of persons, and the intervening four decades also entailed a generational break. Still, former members of the *Schutztruppe* played important roles in the freelance militias (*Freikorps*) which stifled the revolution of 1918–19, and subsequently in the Nazi party (Zimmerer 2011: 277–8). More importantly, during the decades in question a considerable transfer of knowledge, frames of mind and routines were established which were closely related to the maintenance of institutions geared towards colonialism, even after Germany had lost her colonies. In the academic field for instance, this applied to, besides the well-known example of ‘race science’ (see also ch. 12), the equally important field of geography (Zimmerer 2011: 290–324). In the occupied eastern territories, the strategy of securing a gigantic region for German settlement resulted in the death of millions in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union and even expressly aimed for this to happen. Here, once again, in broadly similar ways as has been observed in connection with concentration camps in Namibia, ‘conscious neglect’ was an important means for reaching this objective (Zimmerer 2011: 158, 272; Barth 2006: 89). Furthermore, German war making in Eastern Europe during World War II, in particular when it came to counter-guerrilla strategies (*Partisanenbekämpfung*), showed clear commonalities with ‘wars against entire peoples’ which were typical of colonial wars (Zimmerer 2011: 273; cf. more generally, Kleinschmidt 2013; Moses 2009).

IN SEARCH OF CAUSES FOR CIVILISATION BREAKS

Jürgen Zimmerer’s argument, from which I draw largely here, dovetails quite persuasively with the current debate on settler colonialism and the various forms of genocide connected with it (Moses 2008). In this way, it is also possible to transcend narrow perspectives geared

16 For a similar point see D.B. Furber, *Going East: Colonialism and German Life in Nazi-Occupied Poland*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Department of History. State University of New York, Buffalo, p. 59, as quoted in Keim 2014: 185–6.

to national histories and to pose the question about civilisation breaks in connection with societal modernity, in particular its colonial, and more specifically, its settler colonial forms.

Such connections were recognised at a fairly early stage. Already during the first years of the 20th Century, writers on the classical theory of imperialism stressed the possibility of a backlash when barbaric forms of rule, which were practised in the colonies in a more or less systematic and routine fashion, might also be applied in the metropolises. In Rosa Luxemburg's evocative words: 'Imperialism . . . brings back the catastrophe as a mode of existence from the periphery of capitalist development to its point of origin' (Luxemburg 1921: 117).¹⁷ In her influential book on totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt has taken up this theme with special reference to settler societies in southern Africa and pinpointed the central categories and practices of 'race' and 'bureaucracy' in the context of a highly problematic societal modernity.¹⁸ These forms of barbaric domination concern not so much specific practices but rather the principle of denying specific groups of humans their human properties and rights. This happens on the grounds that they have been subjected to the dominance of a particular state, or been left outside the purview of citizenship altogether as 'stateless'. In this way, such persons and groups are 'rightless' and without the protection a government would normally provide (Arendt 1951: 293–5). Such groups were exposed to the informal violence of the mob or of self-empowered settlers, as well as to the more formal violence emanating from the state. This overall framework applies to the early debates about doubtful rights claimed by settlers in the 'New World' to dispense land (Fitzmaurice 2008; Höffner 1972: 180–232), as does the explicit wording in Trotha's proclamation of October 2, 1904. This proclamation stated that 'the Herero' were 'no longer German subjects' – and by implication, the German state had no obligation to respect their rights as humans.¹⁹ More recent argument, reasoning for instance that the possibilities of policing in Namibia had been so few that 'the thesis of continuity' with Nazi rule would go astray (Zollmann 2010: 70), misses this crucial and overarching context.

Still, the Holocaust cannot be reduced to the quest for a colonial sphere in Eastern Europe. Systematised anti-Semitism meant visible deportations all over Germany and in most countries of occupied Western Europe, in many cases as the immediate prelude to mass annihilation.²⁰ An attempt to consider in context the crimes perpetrated in different theatres will render a complex picture of multi-layered and interrelated processes. By their social content, the differences between such processes are much more pronounced than may appear, as long as they are subsumed under the emblematic and only seemingly clear term of 'Holocaust' (see also Barth 2006: 78–111). At this point, we also reach a level of

17 Luxemburg 1913: ch. 32; Hilferding 1910: 458–9; Hobson 1901/38: 117–146.

18 Arendt 1951: ch. 7; Weitz 2003: 54; for a different reading of Arendt see Moses 2011.

19 As quoted in Drechsler 1980: 156–7; Drechsler's remark that this reference was 'a bad joke' underplays its import; the decisive part is also quoted in Zimmerer 2008: 48.

20 Jews from south-western Germany were deported over 1,000 km to Gurs in southern France before eventually the survivors were brought to Auschwitz in western Poland where they were annihilated.

concreteness which beckons argument around specifically German history, while colonial entanglement remains enmeshed in such history.

In any case, the Holocaust has not been restricted to colonial land appropriation, regardless of the importance such aims had for the war, and in particular, the ways of war making in Eastern Europe. Thus, the great sociologist Norbert Elias reminds us that 'the extermination of the Jews . . . was not an act of war'. Moreover, at least in the case of West European Jewry: 'Their death did not free land for German settlers' (1996: 309). This can be said in similar terms of Sinti and Roma and also of homosexuals, who all fell victim to Nazi annihilation campaigns. However, for Elias, within the framework of his theory of a 'process of civilisation' (1939), this points to a difficult paradox, an accentuated linkage between 'regression to barbarism' (1996: 308), the 'breakdown of civilizing restraints' (1996: 362) on the one hand, and 'tendencies inherent in the structure of modern industrial societies' (1996: 303) on the other. The problem extends further than the apparent contradiction that barbarism and crimes on a mass scale were perpetrated with the utmost rationality.²¹ We need to consider the impact of 'national beliefs [doctrines, norms and ideals]',²² which Elias explains at length. Again, this must be related to the *paradigmatic* character of 'the attempted extermination of the Jews'. Still, this murderous attempt, in Elias's view, constituted 'only one episode in the rise and fall of peoples' (1996: 360). To reach an understanding, Elias refers us to the experience of a long-term national decline which Germans had undergone since the imperial glories of the German Middle Ages. According to this reasoning, such experience had been actualised in the humiliation of the defeat in World War I and the Treaty of Versailles 1918–19. Such bereavement could then be addressed only in authoritarian traditions as one instance that 'bequeathed to the majority of Germans a relatively weak and dependent conscience in public affairs' (1996: 401).

Still, such a diagnosis does not preclude the search for specific steps and features that may have contributed towards the development of such a 'conscience' in a way that favoured the civilisation break. Such considerations can be linked to, among other things, the radicalisation of German nationalism since the 1890s, which has been investigated in particular by Geoff Eley (1978).

A PUBLIC GENOCIDE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

I argue that not just what happened in Namibia, but even more so, the ways in which the colonial war and attendant crimes were communicated in Germany, fall into a pattern of radicalising nationalism. The public discourse at the time led to a disposition of accommodating atrocities against other human beings, including genocide, on a scale that hardly would have been imaginable before. One decisive point here is that developments in

21 For Bauman 1991: ch. 1, this apparent contradiction actually points to the very essence of modernity.

22 Elias 1996: 305, adapted from German version, 1992: 459.

Namibia can be viewed within a trajectory of uninhibited violence directed at the colonial sphere. Such violent practices, however, were a general feature of colonialism and in no way restricted to its German variant. Furthermore, in terms of communication about what happened, such practices were not limited to the colonial sphere. This nexus encompassed, first, the formation of a specific form of war making which included the annihilation of 'natives'. If we follow the careers of German military actors, this process swept through a far-flung range of theatres – the Congo Free State, German East Africa, Northern China and finally, Namibia. As previously mentioned, conceptual as well as personal continuities can be found, not least in the participation of Lothar von Trotha in the war against Wahehe in East Africa, in the campaign against the *Ihetuan* ('Boxers') in Northern China and finally, in the war in Namibia (Gewald 2005; Hull 2005: 25–7). Precisely the 'Boxer' expedition in 1901 marks an important step in the perception and received opinion about what may be seen as permissible and even laudable to perpetrate on humans. As noted (in chapter 2), Emperor William II, in his send-off speech for expeditionary troops to China, had invoked the image of the 'Huns', the epitome of ruthless barbarian brutality, as a role model for the soldiers. The atrocities these troops then committed in China became the subject of acrimonious public debate in Germany (Kuss 2010: 217–8).

At the same time, such events indicate that an 'ultimate break of a taboo' (Zimmerer 2011: 277), such as a genocide, cannot be construed as a singular occurrence. Genocide and civilisational regression should be considered within a longer trajectory. We would then be faced, not with a sudden break, but with a drawn-out process of de-civilisation. Such processes are addressed by Césaire's indictment that colonisation de-civilises the coloniser (1950: 362).

It is important to keep in mind that the colonial war in Namibia differed from other military action in German colonies as well as from actions by other colonial powers in the composition of the fighting force the colonial power employed. Whereas typically, colonial troops were recruited from within the colonial sphere, the *Schutztruppe* deployed in the Namibian War was overwhelmingly made up of volunteers recruited directly from Germany (Mann 2003: 25–6). During the entire course of the war, almost 19,000 German soldiers were deployed in Namibia (Hull 2005: 88). Accordingly, the number of deaths amongst German soldiers – in many cases, by illness – was much higher than the number of German dead during the Maji Maji War in present-day Tanzania. In Namibia, well over 1,000 Germans died from causes related to the war (Bridgman 1981: 164). In contradistinction to this, the war in East Africa, which, on account of much higher population numbers claimed many more African lives in absolute figures, cost only 15 German lives (Wimmelbucker 2005; Iliffe 1979: ch. 6). Besides this high death toll, the German public was also confronted with the exorbitant financial costs of the Namibian War.

For such reasons, it was the Namibian War which for the first time drew intense public attention to the German colonies and triggered intense public controversy around colonial issues (van Laak 2003: 85; ch. 2). As mentioned, the genocide in Namibia took place in full public view. The atrocities that were perpetrated were revelled in as heroic deeds, or at least



Fig. 3.1 Picture postcard, showing *Schutztruppe* soldiers posing with chained prisoners. The handwritten note conveys hearty greetings. From Joachim Zeller's collection with permission.

were propagated as services to Emperor and country. Apparently, little was done to shield crimes committed by the *Schutztruppe* from the German public view. On the contrary, the press reported with 'utmost openness and brutality' (Sobich 2006: 101). This publicity also covered actions amounting to genocide, and there was intense political and parliamentary debate. Dramatic shifts in party alliances found their highpoint in the national elections of 1907 when parties campaigned on the issue of the war in Namibia. All this had a long-term and sustained impact on popular culture and thus entered the everyday lives of many Germans. The situation becomes clearer if we look briefly at the forms and means by which knowledge about the atrocities was conveyed to the German public.

A literal flood of picture postcards was issued and sent off during the war. This was the time when postcards began to figure as one of the important means of communication, and picture postcards served the needs of personal and family relations. Before the war, picture postcards from German South West Africa had shown idyllic scenes of rural life and thus conveyed the exotic pastimes of settlers and colonial soldiers. These topics were now supplanted by images depicting emaciated captives in chains, together with warm greetings to loved ones at home. Images of concentration camps and even of executions

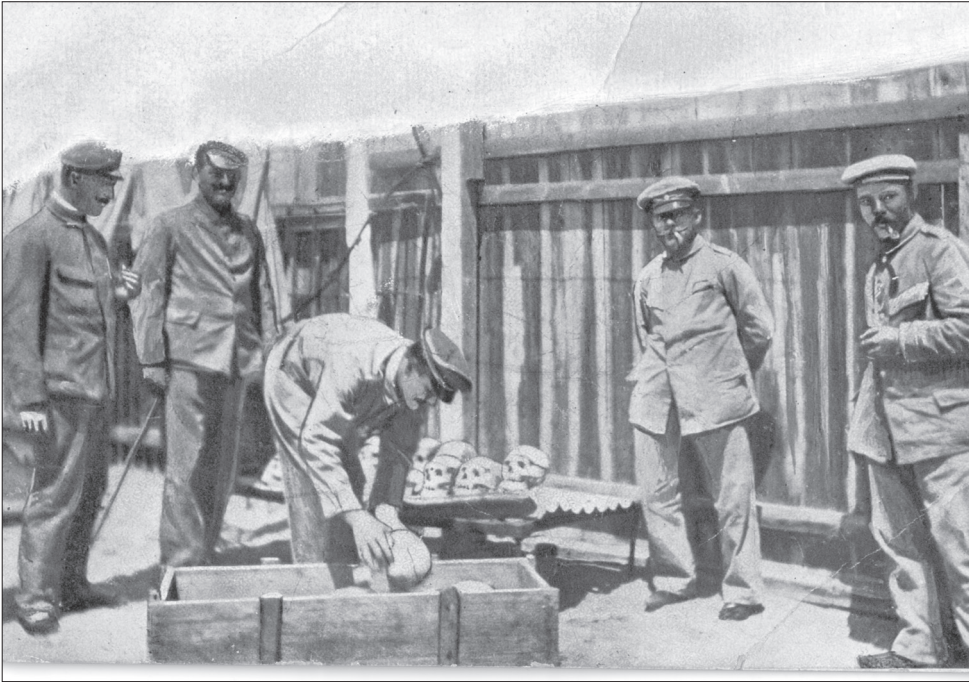


Fig. 3.2 Photograph showing the packing of Ovaherero skulls. Photograph: National Archives of Namibia, photo no. 20128.

were printed on cards and circulated.²³ Shortly after the end of the war and even before the official conclusion of military action in 1907, various memory accounts appeared in print. Here, authors did not shy away from documenting pictures of actions that clearly violated fundamental principles of human behaviour. One image that was published in several versions showed members of the *Schutztruppe* packing crates containing human skulls. The caption informs readers that these were skulls of 'Hereros who had been hanged or killed in action' and they had 'been freed of their flesh by Herero women using shards of glass, and made ready for shipping' (see Zimmerer & Zeller 2008: 77).

While it has been noted repeatedly that these images appear to have been retouched from original photographs, this can hardly diminish the impact which is in focus here: Atrocities committed against Africans were displayed openly as a matter of course or even as brave and virtuous actions. Such open displays of brutal actions against fellow humans, which under circumstances governed by the norms that guarantee any social fabric would be considered as heinous crimes, mark a serious transgression, a step towards a world in which such norms are no longer valid. Reflecting on his own experience of torture in Nazi

²³ See examples from the collection of Joachim Zeller in Zimmerer & Zeller 2008: 53, 67, 149, 152; Axster 2010.

dungeons, Holocaust survivor Jean Améry (1965: 624) pointed out that once such actions are no longer shrouded in secrecy, this is an indication that ‘a revolt of conscience is no longer to be feared’ – that is, public conscience has been muted, or atrocities were accepted by a large section of the public, and not only were committed, but were publicly laid open and even celebrated.²⁴ Améry’s reasoning dovetails with Elias’s assessment of the civic mind and values in early 20th Century Germany. This publicity was not limited to the circulation of images.

Amongst novels reflecting the war, Gustav Frenssen’s *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest* (Peter Moor’s Journey to South West Africa) takes pride of place. At the time, Frenssen was one of the most prominent and successful German writers (Haarhoff 1991: 75; Brehl 2007: 124–6). The novel is based on various reports by German participants in the war (Brehl 2007: 130–1) and framed as a ‘campaign report’ of a young volunteer. Accordingly, the text conforms to the style of an adventure novel. The book presents an array of emblematic occurrences designed to underline the sacrifice of German soldiers. At the same time, the novel conveys current colonialist attitudes and clichés, such as contrasting the civilising exertions of German women to the adversity of the wilderness or at various times referring to African people metaphorically as animals. The intention to annihilate is stated unequivocally, namely ‘to force . . . the enemy to go into a north-easterly direction into thirst and death, so that the colony will at good last be able to rest in peace’ (Frenssen 1906: 109). In one central scene, Frenssen gives the word to a First Lieutenant, a fairly senior officer under the circumstances, who justifies the genocide as practically the execution of a divine mission and as a consequence of absolute national superiority:

These blacks have deserved their death before God and before humanity . . . , since they have not built houses and not dug wells.²⁵ [. . .] God has given us victory here, because we are the nobler ones and those who strive forward. However, this does not mean too much in relation to this black people; yet we have to see to it that we shall become the better and more alert ones before all peoples on earth. (Frenssen 1906: 125)

When a missionary is quoted with the suggestion that ‘all men are brothers’, the First Lieutenant retorts by depicting murder as the fulfilment of duty: ‘We shall have to be hard and to kill for a long time to come; but in doing so, we as individual men and as a people, must strive for high-flying thoughts and noble deeds, so that we shall contribute our part to future, brotherly humanity’ (Frenssen 1906: 125). Here, central motives are summoned that later also figure prominently in the exterminatory rhetoric of the Nazis: the mission to settle; the elimination of certain ethnic groups of people, who were described as useless or vermin; and the arduous task the mission of murder was to those who executed it, and who

²⁴ Améry continues to recall the huge public outcry in France once the practice of torture during the Algerian war of liberation became known.

²⁵ Of course, in reality, the digging and servicing of wells was a long established and sophisticated practice in pre-colonial central and southern Namibia (see Henrichsen 2011: 1–19; Lau 1987: 14).

are cast into heroic roles precisely for undertaking murder and still remaining ‘respectable’ (*anständig*).²⁶ Frenssen’s novel was highly successful, ‘a classic long-seller’ (Lehmann 2011: 115). During its first year after publication in 1906,²⁷ it reached a print run of more than 100,000 copies; in 1908, the book became a set text in schools, and around this time it was also used for basic language instruction in American colleges and universities (Warmbold 1982: 96). A special school edition followed in 1915 and was republished in 1927. Under Nazi rule, numerous editions followed, numbering roughly 200,000 copies. Amongst these were several editions specifically for use in the army and also one for *Organisation Todt*, the powerful special institution tasked with military building construction. In Germany the novel reached a total print run of 430,000 copies up to 1945 (Pakendorf 1987: 176) and it was translated into several languages (Brehl 2008: 104).

Availability in English may be one explanation for the surprising role this novel was given in the South African Blue Book of 1918 on German colonial rule in Namibia. The Blue Book, which was intended to demonstrate the inability and unsuitability of Germany to colonise, and the deleterious effects of German rule in Namibia, contains lengthy passages from the novel.²⁸ One may wonder about the methodological lapse, trying to prove factual statements by quoting from a novel.²⁹ However, for the present consideration, the main point is that a text that was used to a large extent as reading matter for youth and as a school book did contain passages which seemed fit to help prove criminal actions and atrocities committed by German authorities in the colonies. Nor was this a singular case of atrocity committed in GSWA being extolled in teaching materials (Bowersox 2013: 76–77). In this way, a tendency towards publicly trivialising and rendering such crimes banal is revealed. Deeds such as these were presented as practically self-evident and common-place, at least as long as they were perpetrated in far-off places, which, however, were presented as ‘German’ at the same time. Additionally, inhuman action was given the image of patriotic and heroic deeds, and such ideas inculcated into school children.

This attitude emerges with even greater clarity from the official account which was produced by the History Department of the Great General Staff. This book was issued even while the war was still going on and appeared in several instalments. Eventually, it was available in two lavishly styled volumes. The authors stressed that their objective was

26 The allocation rendered by Frenssen resonates closely with the infamous speech Heinrich Himmler delivered to SS leaders on October 4, 1943 in Poznan (Posen), where with reference to the ongoing ‘extermination of Jews’ he extolled the attitude of his henchmen to murder thousands on a daily basis, and still remain ‘respectable’, while having been ‘hardened’; see http://www.1000dokumente.de/pdf/dok_0008_pos_de.pdf, p. 25 (10.7.2014).

27 The data on publication history are based on a comprehensive search in German digital library catalogues, including the German National Library and an exhaustive listing of university libraries (Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog/Karlsruhe Virtual Catalog). The search was conducted on 10.2.2015; the catalogue can be consulted on <http://kvk.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de>.

28 See Silvester & Gewald 2003: 111–3. Concerning the novel’s impact, this circumstance would largely obliterate ambivalences teased out by Haarhoff 1991: 75–81.

29 It is not without irony that the latest edition of *Peter Moor*, published in Windhoek, contains footnotes on individual military engagements and troop movements mentioned in the novel and in this way once again makes it appear to be (almost) a factual account.

‘to convey to the German people in generally accessible form a lively view of duress and hard life of our troops during the campaign and of their valiant behaviour in battle’. The wish to document the ‘gratitude of the entire fatherland’ was also given as the reason for hasty publication, even before all relevant sources were available (Kriegsgesch. Abt. 1906: iii). The decisive phase of the war after the battle of Ohamakari is rendered in this work in exaggerated, solemn language which clearly refers to the genocide and sees it as the consequence of the decisive action and heroism of the German troops:

The pursuit of the Hereros . . . had been a risky undertaking which testifies expressively to the daring of the German military leadership, to the drive and readiness to take on responsibility . . . This bold operation shows in brilliant light the reckless energy of the German leadership in pursuing the beaten enemy. No exertions, no deprivation was spared to deprive the enemy of the last remnants of his capacity to resist. He was driven from water-hole to water-hole like a beast hounded half to death, until, having lost all will, he fell victim to his own country’s nature. The waterless Omaheke was to consummate the task begun by German weapons: the annihilation of the Herero people.³⁰

A participant of the campaign reported that ‘the blocking off of the sandveld over months, executed with iron severity, consummated the work of annihilation’ (Kriegsgesch. Abt. 1906: 214). In this way, contemporaries were in little doubt about what was going on in southwestern Africa, and this was also reflected in German political debate (see chapter 2).

There was much more extensive publishing of ‘popular literature’ than can be conveyed here³¹, and this literature output did not completely come to a stop during the following decades (Schilling 2014: ch. 1). The ‘frenzy’ of war, in particular where it involved confrontation with Africans, both in the colonial context and on the Western Front during World War I, reflected a complex dialectic of desire for the ‘Other’ and border maintenance, which fed into violence and may be seen as a ‘conduit for communicating ideas of the pleasure of extermination to the Nazi era’ (Lehmann 2011: 123). Haarhoff (1991: 80) sees in this literature a potential anticipation of ‘Fascist thought in that its replacement of class with racial white egalitarianism and its mobilisation of race to social ends provides a model which can be twisted to suit an Aryan-slavonic parallel’.

The communication through texts and images was linked to the intensive political struggle in Germany about the conduct of the war. This debate culminated in the ‘Hottentot Elections’ (see chapter 2). In the anti-socialist crusade staged by the Bülow Bloc parties (Nipperdey 1998: 601; Wehler 1995: 1079–80), a dramatised image of the colonial war – the official end was declared shortly before the election date – played an equally important role, as did aggressive propaganda. Seen from the perspective of the targets of this agitation, the

30 Kriegsgesch. Abt. 1906: 207; translation in part adapted from the one provided in Zimmerer 2008: 41. As Bowersox (2013: 76) notes, this passage was used in a 1912 school textbook.

31 cf. the selection of titles in Brehl 2008: 102.

Social Democrats, the campaign created a 'pogrom atmosphere,' as Rosa Luxemburg recalled a few years later (1916: 83; cf. Sobich 2004, 2006). War right down to genocide was not only extolled in writing and in speeches, but also in quite elaborate and costly stagings or circus performances. On these occasions, valiant German soldiers and industrious farmers were depicted having to contend with treacherous blacks. The message was combined with and reinforced by impressions of exoticism (Kirschnick 2002).

Too little attention is normally paid to the protest and resistance the colonial war provoked in Germany. Of course, such activities enhanced public awareness about the conduct of the war. There were the rather cautious and defensive interventions by the Rhenish Missionary Society, who acted on the reports of missionaries on the ground; the missionaries, in part appalled by what had happened to their congregations, were still a far cry from questioning colonialism, let alone the system of governance and social relations in Germany as such (Altena 2007: 37; Engel 1972: 184–209).

A more critical stance could be expected from Social Democracy. August Bebel, the undisputed, patriarchal leader of the party, was not an adversary of colonialism in principle, but a consistent critic of German colonialism. In his role as parliamentary leader of the SPD, Bebel did not mince words to condemn the war conducted by Trotha (see chapter 2). At the same time, Bebel underlined the connection that existed in his view between the way the German military proceeded in Namibia and the experiences of German workers at the hands of state power. However, Bebel did not see this as a backlash of colonial practice to the metropole, but as a continuation of a long-established routine of repression: 'But . . . this policy of violence, of repression, even of brutality is precisely the policy you mete out daily to members of your own people. How can you, who make your own compatriots, as it were, your own kith and kin, undergo such treatment, be expected to go about natives of foreign lands in a different manner, whom you, as whites, even view with sovereign disdain . . . ?' (Bebel 1906: 113). Public awareness about the realities of war in Namibia was doubtlessly promoted by such protest, which was also reflected in the electoral campaign of 1907, where at least at the local level SPD groups aggressively critiqued the colonial war in places such as Augsburg and Nuremberg (Short 2004).

Overall, then, the genocide was represented and debated in ways that are remarkable on two counts. On the one hand, the killing of tens of thousands of people, and the unleashing of bureaucratic violence in the concentration camps, as well as the procuring of material for racial research, were all represented to a large public as a matter of course. This practice clearly rendered banal some forms of action and occurrences that might have been difficult to countenance if they had happened closer to home. On the other hand, these impulses, partly short-term but also sustained, as through fiction, were linked to the rise of radical nationalism. While exponents of this tendency expressed contradictory attitudes specifically when it came to colonies in Africa, they were of one mind concerning the overriding call for a vigorous policy of expansionism (see also Bley 2003: 66–8).

Surely, these considerations do not suggest an unequivocal 'line of continuity' and certainly not a clear 'causal chain' directly linking the colonial genocide to the Holocaust. It

seems plausible, however, to see the broadly based civil society activities just mentioned, as well as communication about the war that took place on a mass scale, as important factors in routinising attitudes which led broader strata to countenance premeditated mass murder and genocide as acceptable and even heroic forms of action. One may posit here, besides other aspects in the activities of nationalist organisations, one of several 'lines of continuity' that do reach further back into German history (Wehler 1995: 1081). Behavioural dispositions and attitudes shift, and the formerly unthinkable moves into the realm of the imaginable.

Omer Bartov (1998) has looked at the re-definitions through which mental preconditions were created which eventually made it possible for Germans to accommodate within their repertoire of action the humiliation and murder of their Jewish neighbour, or at least, acquiescence to such crimes. The idea of a radical break, a 'caesura', connected with the Holocaust (Millet 2011), therefore is in need of qualification. One may be better advised to explore diverse factual configurations and trajectories within a comparative perspective. It seems that research keeps relating back to 'the emergence of the national state in Europe and the expansion of European empires throughout the world' (Bartov 2003: 85).

From such considerations, a further comparative perspective needs to be kept in mind: As indicated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, a view that is fixed exclusively to the issue of German colonialism risks obscuring the commonalities that exist between the varieties of modern colonial rule and in particular, the relationships marked by force and violence that are inherent in colonialism (Moses 2011; Kössler 2004a). A shift towards a more encompassing view is also important in order to avoid provincialisms that would continue existing hierarchical concepts. Especially from an African perspective, such suspicions are an obvious concern, and unfortunately reasons for this abound. In a particularly disconcerting instance, the late French President François Mitterrand commented on the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 as follows: 'in those countries, a genocide is not that all-important'³².

The above considerations, then, imply a danger in too rashly postulating direct, unmediated connections between the colonial genocide in Namibia and the Holocaust. Such an approach also runs the risk of missing the overarching theme of mass violence and force that form inherent features of modernity. This applies, by the same token, to the inherent, pervasive violence of modern colonialism. The discrimination that is inherent in the discursive marginalisation of colonial mass crimes will only be overcome by recognition of historical events and by respecting the victims involved. A legitimate question is whether these necessary processes of remembrance and recognition should be predicated upon the ability of victim groups to make their voices heard sufficiently. Time and again, the implied search for voice is faced with discursive disparities and controversies.

In the Namibian case, such different strands are present within one national nexus. Moreover, what is at issue here is the central heritage of settler colonialism. Under such circumstances, the potential for intense debate and conflict is obvious, and much of the following chapters will deal with the ways this is played out in Namibia.

32 *Le Figaro*, 12.1.1998, as quoted in Diener 2010: 312.

At the same time, the still inconclusive debate on the precise relationship that exists between the colonial genocide in Namibia and the Holocaust reveals the difficulties of clearly mapping out, or even of giving causal explanations, in the face of tremendous complexity. Moreover, this issue points to a perspective of global history. The challenge is to keep such a global perspective in view without losing the necessary concrete context which needs to be culled – at least provisionally – from a framework of national history, which then has to be referred back to the global nexus. Therefore, transnational memory politics, as dealt with in this book, poses a unique challenge as well as a singular chance to contribute towards a truly global perspective.

In grappling with such complex issues, scholarly endeavour faces the particular challenge of trying to live up to the task while not losing sight of the fact that the endeavour addresses the most horrific mass crimes of world history. This also means that scholarly forays should not be dissociated from the responsibility one incurs when entering such an arena of intersecting concerns of scientific insight, and the moral issues connected with the memory politics that arise from quests for recognition and redress for crimes against humanity.

From a different perspective, the observations of the following three chapters are related to the forms of communication about the Namibian War and the genocide while these events were on-going, and afterwards. These forms of exchange created a register from which subsequent generations drew, or from which they dissociated themselves.

4

Namibia's Germany: Transnational Implications of Settler Colonialism

THE LONG PROCESS OF MEMORY POLITICS BETWEEN NAMIBIA AND GERMANY revolves around two central issues. One is the presence of a German speaking community in Namibia, while the other is the country's past as a former German colony. The two aspects are closely interrelated, but they need to be treated separately if we want to understand the current situation. In this chapter, therefore, I shall give an overview of the background of German speakers in Namibia, which is set against constructions of 'Germany' and 'Germans' by Namibians. These constructions are viewed first among Namibians at large, and thereafter, specifically among German speakers. Such constructs are of central relevance to the current process of negotiating remembrance and its implications. In this way I hope to shed more light on the intricate web of both the *inter*- and *intra*-societal relationships that are implied when we talk of Namibian–German relations.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF GERMANY AND GERMANS

Germany is more relevant by far to Namibia than Namibia is to Germany and to most Germans. This asymmetrical relationship may be accounted for in a number of ways, including the relative population figures and sizes of the economies. Such mundane considerations, however, are inevitably intertwined with the postcolonial relationship. In central and southern Namibia, people experience something 'German' almost on a daily basis. One may think of (frequently disregarded) street names or names of supermarkets,

and of colonial buildings which have been carefully renovated to attract German tourists. More importantly, a sweeping re-ordering of space was first undertaken under German rule in the wake of the genocide (see Zimmerer 2011). The present layout of the landscape in central and southern Namibia remains a direct consequence of that genocide, and the prevailing property relations result in a rigidly ordered landscape. Priority is given to economic endeavours, leaving vast stretches of barren land largely devoid of humans. Also, the landless face serious problems in terms of their need to graze animals.

A further consequence of the redistribution of land initiated under German rule is that white landowners typically claim control over the right of admission to ancestral grave sites, which black Namibians still remember. In Namibia today whites 'own' areas many blacks still consider to be their ancestral land. Even where this sad state of affairs is not complemented by the dependent position of an indigenous farm labourer, the situation serves as a constant reminder of historic loss and trauma, and such reminders are confronted on a daily basis. Relevant narratives are transmitted through oral tradition. The re-ordering of space may be rooted in the distant period under German rule, but even today the large number of German speaking commercial farmers and the high profile presence of German speakers in privileged positions in economic life in general serve as reminders of this colonial redistribution. One may also point to the array of higher-end stores in Windhoek and certainly in Swakopmund as signs of economic power and affluence of German speaking Namibians. Furthermore, as we shall see, some of this German speaking group have played a vociferous part in debates about German colonialism in the country, above all denying the colonial genocide (see ch. 5).

On a more personal, even intimate plane, a discourse mainly among Otjiherero speakers refers to their own German ancestry. This is linked to the record of sexual violence, above all during the Namibian War, including rape, forced prostitution and various forms of keeping concubines. In such discourse people refer to physical features, such as light skin or straight noses. One main issue concerns the difficulty with which children of white fathers are located within the complex dual kinship system that is practised by Ovaherero. A more immediate concern, however, points to the distinct negligence of most German men. Even where parentage was known and in some way acknowledged, most of these fathers, once they returned to Germany, left their offspring and their mothers to their own devices. In this way, these men cut all ties and denied belonging or affiliation, and above all, responsibility. Discourse along these lines was strongly articulated at the centennial commemoration of the fateful battle of Ohamakari on August 14, 2004. In a very conspicuous way, many people wore light green placards showing the names of their German ancestors (sometimes several per person). This demonstration of claims to ancestry was complemented by individual expressions of concern and distress.¹

An indispensable component of this kinship discourse addresses German responsibility. This responsibility is couched in a three-pronged identification which is premised on the overarching idea of kinship forged by the illegitimate relationships in question. Such kinship

1 Personal observation; see also Förster 2010: 319–321.

is construed not only in relation to the families of common forebears, but to 'Germans' and 'Germany' in general.

In addition, this identification is extended to German speakers in Namibia, regardless of whether they actually claim a Namibian identity. However, it should be noted that very similar sentiments can be found among German speakers themselves. For example, the first German Ambassador to Namibia, Harald Ganns, reported that in the early 1990s, he encountered expectations by German speakers who wanted to act 'as something of [their] tribal chief'. Then a Namibian cabinet minister reproached him: 'What have your Germans done again?' to which he responded, 'These are *your* Germans, not *my* Germans' (Ganns 2002: 88).

Under the circumstances, such cross-cutting identity constructs clearly translate into responsibility that has been neglected not only by individual German progenitors of parents, grandparents and great-grandparents of those living today, but that accrues to 'Germany' at large. Neglect of parental duty – unquestionable in the case of the overwhelming majority of German forefathers of living Ovaherero – is transferred to Germany and Ovaherero in general. In this way, from a Namibian, or at least a southern and central Namibian perspective, 'Germany' forms an integral part of the mnemoscope in question. 'Germans' and 'Germany' therefore are seen as actors, to some extent even as a kind of amalgamated collective actor within this mnemoscope.

Arguably, this looks different from a metropolitan German vantage point. For this difference in viewpoint, at least two reasons may be found. The first, most obvious and possibly most difficult reason to remedy, is that the German public pays much less attention to anything happening in and about Namibia, including Namibian–German relations, than Namibia pays to Germany, and in particular to Namibian–German relations. As mentioned above, this situation clearly refers back to the colonial and postcolonial connection. Except for a few fleeting moments, and regardless of the ideological impact of the Namibian War, Namibia has been marginal to Germany. Germany, on the other hand, has been of central and visible importance to Namibia for 150 years, in the form and consequences of colonial rule. At least in part, the heritage of German colonialism includes the presence of German speakers who continue to occupy a central and influential position. This merits a closer look for a clearer understanding of what drives and motivates actors in memory politics.

IDENTITY ISSUES OF GERMAN SETTLERS IN NAMIBIA²

Irrespective of their modest numbers of less than 20,000³ – less than one percent of Namibia's gross population – German speakers form a vital part of the postcolonial, transnational relationship that exists between Namibia and Germany. German speaking Namibians, as they are Namibian citizens, are no more Germans than German speaking Swiss, Austrians,

2 The following section is a revised and adapted version of the one in Kössler 2010a: 212–27 (same heading).

3 Botha 2007: 30; by and large, this figure is confirmed by the 2011 census, see AZ, 10.4.2013.

Belgians or South Tyrolians in Italy. However, the ethnogenesis of German speaking Namibians (see Rüdiger 1993) differs from these groups. Such difference applies also to the last three groups mentioned. These groups formed their collective identities during the 20th Century, as German speaking Namibians did. The difference observed in Namibia is largely due to the fact that German speaking Namibians came into the country as settlers, privileged by the colonial state. More or less consistently they have looked to Germany as their patron power, even though this has meant vastly different things over the century since German colonial rule in Namibia ended. However, no other ethnic group in Namibia can and does refer to a foreign power as one central point of reference the way many German speakers still do. At the same time, German speakers in European countries, like the groups mentioned above, have in most cases adapted proudly to their lives in states *other* than Germany. German speakers in Namibia appear much more ambivalent on this count, which is one more reason to trace their trajectory, even though in very broad strokes.

Junior partners in the 'white phalanx'

As we have seen, Namibia was the sole former German colony with a comparably strong presence of settlers from Germany. In spite of the repatriation of a large group after the Treaty of Versailles, German speakers comprised a majority amongst settlers in the country up to the mid-1920s. From that time onwards, German speakers found themselves in a minority position within the overall minority white or settler population. Here, Afrikaans speakers from South Africa became more and more numerically predominant.

German speakers in Namibia developed resentments against the new power-holders from South Africa, very similar to, and possibly stronger than, those directed against the Versailles treaty and articulated in colonial revisionism in Germany itself. The extent of injury to nationalist narcissism, which the defeat in war and the loss of sovereignty over the colony entailed, may be gauged from the boisterous ways in which permanent possession of the territory was proclaimed after the genocidal campaigns of 1903–08 had eliminated effective African resistance. The plaque at the military cemetery at Waterberg proclaimed such permanent dominion, but it was removed under South African rule (Förster 2008: 254). The rhetoric employed in commemorations by German speakers at the Waterberg into the 1990s still resembled such an approach (Förster 2010: 232–5; Krüger 1999: 269–70). Before its removal in late 2013, the Rider Statue in Windhoek had changed to an extent from 'a quasi-official mark of sovereignty' (Zeller 2000: 119) to a mere tourist attraction, but with some reflection, its message remained unmistakable (see ch. 6). To a considerable extent, the sting of defeat may be seen as the flipside of such boastfulness – at least as long as reflection on the underlying reasons for the war remains absent. Arguably, such denial made up the essence of nationalist sentiments and revisionist backlash among Germans generally – that is, mainly in the metropole – after World War I.

In Namibia, German speakers' resentment was directed against the new colonial power. The settlers now saw themselves as living under foreign rule. Such resentment was matched

by the quest of the new South African administration to integrate the colony as thoroughly as possible into South Africa. However, some basic consensus amongst all whites was prerequisite for this purpose. Moreover, 'Pretoria needed the Germans as a buffer against the African population' (Eberhardt 2007: 66), and both Jan Smuts and General Hertzog, the consecutive South African Prime Ministers, were 'keen . . . to absorb the Germans into the South African white community' (Ngavirue 1997: 133). This attitude meant that 'the German settlers in South West Africa were, by contrast to their compatriots in other former German colonies, treated with unexpected generosity' (Ngavirue 1997: 147–8). In particular, this approach concerned the creation of a 'white phalanx' in the field of 'native policy' (Eberhardt 2007: 209; Ngavirue 1997: 134).

At the same time, internal conflict within the settler community revolved around issues of ethnic identity between Afrikaans and German speakers with the linchpin of language rights (Ngavirue 1997: 141–7). This conflict was peppered by persistent prejudices criss-crossing the sections of 'Germans', 'Union' and 'Afrikaners' as well as 'English' (Botha 2007: 16–9). An important point of contention concerned the citizenship of settlers. South Africa prevailed in according its own citizenship to all of them. However, in the London Treaty of 1924 the German Government secured a right for Germans to retain dual citizenship, with a view toward possibly realising its own colonial revisionist dreams at a later date (Eberhardt 2007: 103–7).

Significantly, one of the first actions within the Legislative Assembly that issued from the first – all white – elections in 1926 concerned the elimination from the public realm (and the physical destruction) of the controversial Blue Book. This was the South African Government document that recorded crimes and misdeeds of the German colonial administration in the successful effort to argue for the transfer of Namibia to South African control. At the time, the elimination of the Blue Book was presented as a means of helping to resolve the 'race hatred . . . [that] . . . has eaten like a cancer into the nation', as the *Windhoek Advertiser* editorialised (as quoted in Silvester & Gewald 2003: xxxi). Needless to say the opposed 'races' referred to here were the sections within the white community so desperately in search of understanding. Such an agreement was needed to safeguard its common interest and privilege. The 'nation' mentioned in the editorial therefore was based – as in South Africa – on the exclusion of the black majority. Still, many German speakers in Namibia (as well as rightists in Germany) persisted in their resentment against the 'November criminals', politicians who were blamed for having betrayed, in November 1918, a supposedly victorious army, thus causing Germany's downfall. Simultaneously, the German foreign office actively fostered and promoted links to German speakers in Namibia as well as colonial revisionist organisations (Eberhardt 2007: 127). The Office even pursued aggressive schemes to bring in new German settlers (Eberhardt 2007: 138–51).

Ngavirue (1997: 133–135) notes clear differences in the mid-1920s between a majority of German speakers who were prepared to adapt to the situation of South African rule and strive for improving their position within this framework, and a small minority of intransigents who rejected South African citizenship. At the same time, 'the confrontation

between Germans and South Africa superseded the fundamental political orientations' within the German speaking community (Eberhardt 2007: 121). Thus, the German League (*Deutscher Bund*) was founded with the express aim of transcending party lines.⁴

German speakers generally continued to follow their nationalist orientation and routine, in any case where their public appearance was concerned (Eberhardt 2007: 125). They kept to the old festival calendar and staged traditional events according to the 'militarist-nationalist basic mindset' that blotted out all social and ideological cleavages that might have existed within this group (Eberhardt 2007: 125). Significantly, the military apparel at these occasions did not meet with any objections from the authorities (Eberhardt 2007: 124–5, 268, 272). These activities took place at the same time that commemorations by black Namibians, notably public appearances of *oturupa*, were prevented, or regimented by stiff limitations that were directed specifically at military attire and behaviour such as 'drilling' (see ch. 8). Formed into a political pressure group in spite of its non-partisan pretensions, the German League contested the (whites only) elections to the Legislative Assembly, where its representatives, advised by the German Consulate in Windhoek, pursued their sectional objectives (Eberhardt 2007: 168–90). German diplomacy followed developments in the mandated territory mainly in the sense of safeguarding the interests of German speakers (Eberhardt 2007: 223).

Nazi influence and Nazi leanings

Even before power was handed over to Hitler in Germany on January 31, 1933, the Nazi party had created a considerable organisation in Namibia (Ngavirue 1997: 136–7). Once in government, the Nazis actively promoted their 'South West Africa Group' among German speakers in Namibia, which led to a Nazi 'takeover' of most German associations in the country during 1933 (Eberhardt 2007: 243–66), even though there were countervailing movements among German speakers. Still, the Consulate in Windhoek even tried to induct young German speakers into the German army (Eberhardt 2007: 304–5). In spite of individualistic leanings of many farmers, the Nazi drive to control all organisations and thereby the lives of German speakers (*Gleichschaltung*) was by and large successful, not least on account of the prevailing nationalist orientation that translated into loyalty and enthusiasm for Nazi Germany (Eberhardt 2007: 371–99).

The crack-down on Nazi organisations from 1934 onwards basically did not change the situation. This move by the South African authorities certainly did little to affect prevailing identifications, loyalties and aims amongst German speakers (Eberhardt 2007: 283–311). During World War II, many German speaking men suffered internment, for example in the well-known camp of Andalusia where an 'emergency region' (*Notgau*) of the Nazi Party was formed. At the same time, 'numerous Germans' still publicly showed the Hitler salute even during the war (Eberhardt 2007: 411–6; as quoted on p. 416). The Windhoek Police noted

4 Ngavirue 1997: 13; the organisation's constitution is documented in Ngavirue 1997: 286–8.

that wives of interned German men kept on spreading Nazi propaganda.⁵ Botha (2007: 20) notes 'significant tensions' between Nazi-inclined, newly arrived German speakers and 'older settlers'. The nature of such tensions may be gauged from the account of an elderly German lady: Looking back fifty years later, on the time of internment during World War II, she still railed against a 'German renegade' and 'ex-Germans' whom she claimed she had threatened with a sjambok (Gretschel 2009: 65). In another instance, ostracism by local 'Germans' for his dissident political views caused an Okahandja garage owner to relocate to Ovamboland as a trader in 1938 (Dobler 2014: 36).

In this way, Nazi influence played out not exclusively on the level of official, at the time by definition, white politics. The few glimpses into this situation that can be supplied are by no means exhaustive, and point to a rich field of potential research. These episodes concern in particular relationships that existed between autochthonous communities and German speakers. Arguably the most important interface in this respect was provided by the resident Rhenish missionaries, who had been present in southern and central Namibia since the middle of the 19th Century. With very few exceptions, these men were drawn from Germany. The orientation of the Rhenish Mission towards German national concerns can hardly be in doubt. A few episodes may suffice here. In 1907, in the late phases of the Nama–German War, and in the face of the devastation wrought by genocide and wholesale deportation of the resident Witbooi from what still is considered their traditional capital, missionary Christian Spellmeyer of Gibeon noted in a report the need to focus particularly on southwest Africa as 'a *German colony*' and furthermore, to see to it 'that it remains Protestant and becomes German'.⁶

Again, in 1934, roughly two years after the establishment of Nazi rule in Germany, and under the brunt of restrictions placed on financial transfers from Germany abroad and also to Namibia, Johannes Olpp, the *Präses* cum Mission Inspector of the Rhenish Missionary Society in Namibia, inquired of his superiors, 'whether . . . the *Reich* does in the future no more see a stake in a German mission in a territory that once was German and under the right circumstances might become German again.'⁷ Olpp sympathised with the Confessing Church, which was to move into confrontation with the Nazis during later years. Olpp's successor in the office of *Präses*, Heinrich Vedder, well known as 'a central figure of the Southwester German community' (Engel 1976: 477), did not hide his leanings towards the Nazis. In keeping with these sentiments, Vedder thought that the long-term future of Namibia would be based on the idea of divinely ordained white dominance (Engel 1976: 473–5). During World War II, Vedder, in his capacity as *Präses* of the Rhenish Mission in Namibia, explored the possibility of handing over the Rhenish mission congregations in Namibia to the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingskerk. This initiative was based on a distinctly nationalist agenda. Vedder linked his hope for Nazi Germany's victory to the

5 Eberhardt 2007: 415; this is confirmed by oral accounts, collected from some of these women by Gretschel 2009.

6 Vereinigte Evangelische Mission/Rheinischen Missions-Gesellschaft (VEM/RMG), file 2.500, Quartalbericht Gibeon, Spellmeyer, 16.2.1907.

7 VEM/RMG, 2.693, *Präses* and Inspector J. Olpp to Mission Director Warneck and Inspector Johannsen, 26.11.1934.

expectation that 'should Germany obtain colonies, Southwest will not be among them, and this would mean that the German missionaries will have to remove themselves to other colonies.'⁸ Remarkably, it was precisely suspicion about such designs that five years later prompted Nama evangelists to secede from the Rhenish Mission (Kössler 1999a).

Determined support by German speakers in Namibia for the war effort of Nazi Germany was closely related to the internment of a large number of German speaking men during World War II. This experience is widely regarded as seminal to the formation of a *Südwest* identity and generally associated with tales of suffering. As one of the accounts collected by Gretscher (2009: 180–1) attests, in the beginning, some male German speakers were even keen to be interned, since they did not count on a long war nor on Germany's defeat, and wanted to confirm their camaraderie with the internees.

The war was also reflected locally. One instance takes us to Krantzplatz (Gibeon) reserve, widely associated with Witbooi (Ikhowsen), and certainly regarded by that community as at least their provisional home, pending more far-reaching claims by the group. From 1935, the Superintendent or Welfare Officer in this reserve had been Fritz Gerdes, a teacher at the Rhenish Mission industrial school at Krantzplatz some ten kilometres north of Gibeon, and the reserve headquarters.⁹ Gerdes had proven himself in the capacity of jack-of-all-trades, supervising work on dams and performing technical jobs in a number of cases. He therefore seemed a good choice for the post of superintendent and was unanimously endorsed by the Reserve Board, the representation of the residents, and also by local officials. From the beginning, Gerdes highlighted his ethnic identity by using German in his official correspondence, as if in anticipation of the pending recognition of the language as a third official one besides English and Afrikaans. Gerdes only changed this practice with the beginning of the war, but seems to have maintained a high-handed attitude towards reserve residents, who included the bulk of leading Witbooi. Matters escalated in a conflict over the branding of cattle – a much resented prerogative of white officials who were in charge of the branding irons that had been purchased at the expense of the reserve funds. The process itself was an occasion to make Africans feel their subordinate and powerless position. This tension was exacerbated by the superintendent's disdainful attitude when, on short notice, he failed to keep the set date for the procedure. At this occasion, his detractors pointed out his 'German' identity. The identity problem was reiterated after the war when leading Witbooi declared they now refused to remain 'under a German' as superintendent and asked for him to be replaced by an Afrikaner.

Similarly motivated resentments and charges were raised against the resident Rhenish missionary Fritz Mayer, who along with Gerdes was blamed for threats uttered during the war about an impending return to German rule. Again, these allegations fed into the conflict between missionaries and Nama evangelists that culminated in a church split in 1946 (Kössler 1999a; Sundermeier 1973: 15–84). Elsewhere, 'German farmers' were reported

8 NAN, SWAA A216/6. Union of South Africa Censorship. Office of the Administrator, Correspondence Suspected to Require Special Attention, intercepted letter Vedder to Ds. J.G. Olivier, Cape Town, 1.12. 1941. Vedder's assessment was realistic; on the inconsistent (and phantasmagoric) Nazi colonial plans during the war, see Linne 2008: 76–7, 82, 141.

9 For the following, see also Kössler 2005b: 220–4.

'in the late 1920s and early 1930s' to have told their African workers that Germany soon 'would be back in control and drive out Afrikaners' (Botha 2007: 20).

There were also instances of quite amicable relations, at least at times, between settler farmers, in particular German speakers, and their neighbours who lived in adjoining reserves. In Berseba, some 80 km north of Keetmanshoop, the Administration had succeeded, in 1938, in imposing its direct control by engineering the deposition of the enterprising and assertive *Kaptein* Diederik Goliath (Kössler 2005b: 132–48). One of the charges brought against the *Kaptein* concerned his direct relations with neighbouring farmers, many of them German speakers, while the Administration tried to mediate and thereby control such relationships. During World War II, the farmer Klostermann of Süderecke, which borders the reserve, viz. the communal lands, was restricted to his farm and continued to run a shop there. Klostermann then was blamed by the authorities of conspiring with the 'natives' and in particular, was seen as the instigator behind the low returns of collections to support the war effort; in this respect, Berseba fell drastically behind in comparison, for example, to collections from Witbooi (Kössler 2005b: 152–3). Similar instances involving neighbourhoods and communication between resident Africans and German speakers were reported from other parts of the Police Zone as well.¹⁰

Limits to reorientation after 1945

After the end of World War II, some German speakers were expelled and others repatriated voluntarily (Eberhardt 2007: 421). The London Treaty according South African citizenship to German speakers was terminated, making them stateless and thus threatened with deportation (Dierks 1999: 112). Above all, 1945 marked the definitive end of all 'irredentist hopes' (Eberhardt 2007: 459) in the sense of bringing back German colonial rule.

The ways this was dealt with initially within the German speaking community may have been reflected in Heinrich Vedder's editorial for *Afrikanischer Heimatkalender*, which appeared in late 1945. Vedder passed over Nazi crimes with silence and did not clearly pronounce at all what had happened during that year – Nazi Germany's definitive defeat and the disclosure of unprecedented crimes committed in the German name, including industrialised genocide. In an opaque way, Vedder only referred to deep sorrow that had befallen his audience and himself, and bemoaned the experience of being slighted in public by others, for reasons he did not spell out or discuss.¹¹ By 1947, Vedder performed a 'u-turn' when he quickly veered from 'mourning Hitler's defeat' to advocating Namibia's incorporation into South Africa (Eberhardt 2007: 459). After Vedder had been appointed

10 NAN, SWAA A50/59, Native Affairs. Drilling by Natives. Truppienspieler v. 1 (1917 – 6.6.1938), SWA Police Omaruru to District Commandant, Police District No. 3, Omaruru, 4.5.1937; Native Commissioner, Windhoek (Trollope) to CNC, 14.2.1938; Note to Secretary for SWA, 6.7.1938; Letter protesting against such allegations: Brief Translation of letter addressed to the Chief Native Commissioner, Mr. F.P. Courtney-Clarke, by the natives of the Waterberg East Native Reserve, 12 September, 1938; Secretary for SWA to Secretary for the Prime Minister, 9.12.38; Letter from Okahandja (transl. 6.5.1939). All these constitute evidence from the Truppienspieler file.

11 *Afrikanischer Heimatkalender*, 1946, p. 1 (*Zum Geleit*); the annual is now published as *Perspektiven*.

senator by the first apartheid government in 1950, at least some influential Ovaherero saw this as a betrayal by a person they had regarded as their 'father' (Gockel 2012: 50). In 1960, a contribution in *South West News/Suid Wes Nuus*, the first Namibian newspaper run by blacks, in a similar way described feelings towards 'Germans' as shaped much more decisively by their siding with 'apartheid-Broederbond-Baasskap' than with 'the cruel deeds of the Germans during 1904 and the two or three years thereafter'.¹²

These sentiments reflected the *rapprochement* between German speakers and nationalist Afrikaners (in particular with the National Party) which had already begun shortly before the war (du Pisani 1985: 83–4). Such alliance building continued after 1945. Now, the NP opposed expulsion of German speakers from Namibia and thus garnered support among them (Eberhardt 2007: 424–5; du Pisani 1985: 88). Eventually, with a realignment of white politics in the territory along ideological rather than language lines (du Pisani 1985: 88), and with the advent to power of the NP in South Africa in 1948, German speakers for the most part became 'loyal adherents of the NP' (Eberhardt 2007: 460); they opted for South African citizenship and threw in their electoral weight to buttress the NP majority in the South African Parliament (Eberhardt 2007: 472–3). Arguably, this 'entente . . . was premised on the assumption of a convergence of socio-political views' (Botha 2007: 23), i.e. advocacy and support of Apartheid.

In this way, for German speakers in Namibia, the defeat of Nazi Germany did not amount to a fundamental challenge to received world views. What seemed called for was a change of means for pursuing unchanged objectives: the implicit ones of securing racially based privilege and the explicit ones of safeguarding their cultural and linguistic profile (see Eberhardt 2007: 475–91). One might say that German speakers in Namibia thus could replicate in an even smoother way what has been described with respect to Germany 64 years after the end of World War II: 'Some stepped out of the Nazi *Reich* and its criminal history just like one steps out of a tramway, to get on with cleaning up and making money' (Prantl 2009). One might also see parallels here with right wing Afrikaner nationalists and Nazi sympathisers in South Africa, who (re-)joined the NP bandwagon and built successful, even presidential careers (Marx 2008: 554–65). Consequently, German speakers in Namibia were able to cultivate a collective self-image characterised by 'a delayed awareness and recognition of the reality of the atrocities in Europe visited by Germans on Jews in particular'. As a consequence, concern with Nazi crimes 'in South West Africa . . . has taken much longer to manifest itself if at all' (Botha 2007: 25, ch. 5).

The 'formal break with the past' which German speakers in Namibia did perform (Botha 2007: 26) was of a decidedly different kind than the breaks that the cataclysm of 1945 forced on metropolitan Germans. In the case of Namibia, altogether three deputations were received by South African Prime Ministers Smuts and Malan. Particularly the latter, from his accession to government in 1948, proved forthcoming in accommodating the needs of German speakers. These needs referred mainly to removing the threat of deportation and guaranteeing property and possibilities for relatives to return to the country. In addition, the

12 *South West News/Suidwes Nuus*, 3.9.1960, as quoted from Henrichsen 1997.

issue of citizenship was resolved, under Malan's aegis, to the mutual benefit of both parties – the German speakers gained security and legal equality with other whites in Namibia, while the National Party secured for itself another strategic group of adherents within the exclusively white electorate (Eberhardt 2007: 441–91).

At the same time, 'a steady stream of immigrants after 1949' arrived from Germany, and German speakers 'regained and consolidated their position in the farming, commercial and professional sectors' (Thomas 1978: 44). This realignment was also reflected in memory practices. Established events, such as the Waterberg commemoration or rituals in front of the Rider Statue in Windhoek were now rededicated to an extent. These events were no longer staged solely to address German military exploits or German soldiers, but were presented as a more encompassing commemoration of white soldiers who had died in wars in Namibia (Förster 2010: 200–3; Zeller 2000: 244).

As later research has shown, a large majority of German speakers in Namibia display a consistent orientation towards an image of Germany, German culture and identity which is geared more to the Wilhelminian time, and arguably also to the period of Nazi rule, than to post-World War II developments. While the GDR in the East fell under the anti-communist anathema, the Federal Republic in the West was seen in an ambiguous light. In the eyes of many German speakers in Namibia, West Germany had betrayed 'German' values and succumbed to Americanisation. In a way, this view favoured the image of German speakers in Namibia as persevering guardians of what they considered to be German, characteristically couched in the term *Deutschtum*, the essence of emphatic German-ness (Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 278–96). Such 'self-demarcation' (Rüdiger 1993: 81–4) dovetails with an affective 'counter-reaction against the coming of a modern industrial society . . . , the rejection of social change towards a secular, industrial world' (Rüdiger & Weiland 1992: 346). Very similar sentiments are main motivations for immigration to Namibia by Germans across various generations, from the times of German colonial rule. Thus the quest for pristine authenticity was an important motive that informed the world view of large groups of German speakers (Bley 1968: 243–5).

Such attitudes link up with the stubbornness which leading and vocal representatives of the German speaking community in Namibia display in their refusal to face up to historical responsibility on account of the colonial past, and in particular, the genocide. Even though such denialist tendencies, to be dealt with further in the subsequent chapter, may not be representative of 'the total German speaking community in Namibia' (Töttemeyer 2013: 79), divergent views are rarely, if ever, articulated from within that community.¹³ More broadly, one may refer to a tendency of whites in Namibia to 'encapsulate themselves socially, economically and politically' (Töttemeyer 2013: 12). Furthermore, social pressure exerted

¹³ See the closing section of ch. 6 below. Recently, Melber (2015: 16–9) has stressed the constructive role played by a number of German speakers during the 1980s, in advocating the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435 (1978) and initiating contacts with SWAPO in exile. However, also here, the question is about the long-term effects of such forays on the group at large. Equally, it would seem that dissident or otherwise critical minds do not necessarily stress their being part of the German speaking community. Similarly, see Töttemeyer 2015: 291–303.

to enforce group conformity (see below) may make it difficult to maintain dissident views without opting out completely.

The obstinacy to come to terms with the dire dimensions of the past articulates the persistent cleavages that still characterise Namibian society after a quarter of a century of independence. Thus, denialist attitudes towards the genocide in Namibia of 1904–08 are linked in subtle or not so subtle ways to denial and down playing when it comes to the Holocaust.

The ways and means employed to project the denialist position as the predominant view within the German speaking community, and to give voice to it beyond its confines, are a reflection of this community's privileged overall position of affluence, both in absolute terms and within the Namibian context, where it stands at the apex of a steeply stratified, extremely unequal society (see ch. 1). Based on their socio-economic status, German speakers were able to secure 'a number of niche areas that allowed for a significant degree of autonomous action' and thus to create preconditions for 'a decidedly German imprint in fields such as tourism, environmentalism and amateur science' (Botha 2007: 36). These are prerequisites to give 'voice' to those who wish to project their views onto a wider public. This potential is further enhanced by the constant reference to Germany as a patron state, even though developments in both parts of Germany after 1945 are vehemently disowned, not least in the register of a 'distinctly local, or African, identity' (Botha 2007: 36).

Still, communication being mostly in German means that it remains restricted to a limited community within Namibia and contributes to the tendency toward self-referential communication already noted. However, this communication option eases exchange with Germany and thus widens the reach of arguments. Here, exchanges are clearly enhanced by the possibilities of microelectronics and the internet. After all, given their socio-economic status, Namibian German speakers rarely turn up on the wrong side of the digital divide, and thus they stand to profit disproportionately.

In this way, communication, let alone solidarity with other communities in Namibia, tends to be difficult. Such a pattern reproduces existing asymmetric relationships, based on disparities, not least in landownership. This asymmetry is exemplified by a German speaking farmer who sees himself as reaching out to Ovaherero by *allowing* some of their leaders to access holy places situated on his farm, the main site of the 1904 'Battle of the Waterberg', or of Ohamakari (Von Wietersheim 2008: 73–4). Even while couched in a language of reconciliation by the farmer, his attitude does not question the asymmetric power situation established by genocidal war, while his neighbour is one of the main actors who actively rail against the very term 'genocide' when applied to the annihilation policy meted out against Ovaherero and Nama a hundred years ago (Schneider-Waterberg 2011; see also chs 5 and 11).

The high degree of internal cohesion that is observed within the German speaking community may be understood as a corollary of setting themselves apart from other groups, in an environment that has been experienced as harsh and even hostile, as well as on account of historical experience. As we have seen, since 1915, German speakers in Namibia saw

themselves as members of a minority, having lost their position as citizens of the ruling colonial power. Moreover, they soon saw themselves in a minority position within the settler society (Eberhardt 2007: 66) – regardless of the fact that the real majority in the country has of course always been made up of Africans. As Eberhardt notes, settlers saw their powers curtailed to a certain extent; thus, the right to inflict corporal punishment on their servants as they saw fit was removed under the Master and Servants Act. ‘For the predominantly German settlers, even the few liberalisations were too much’ (2007: 57).

If such changes engendered resentment, conflict was to focus largely on cultural and language issues. The fight for preserving the German language and what many or most *Südwesters* perceived as German culture has been pervasive and has resulted in the formation of a number of associations. These bodies remain dedicated not only to specific tasks, such as organising and funding schools and maintaining their status in negotiations with the incumbent state authorities, but they also provide important venues for forging and reproducing communal bonds (Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 314–23).

‘German’ and ‘African’

After independence, small, private, well-equipped German schools were created in centres of German settlement largely to evade the influx of the general population into government schools, along with perceived poor standards and consequently, little chance for learners to move on to the envisaged foreign university studies (Leskien 2004: 188–9). Still today, there are private German secondary schools in Windhoek and Swakopmund which are supported in various ways by the German state. This applies above all to the opportunity to obtain the German secondary school certificate *Deutsche Internationale Abiturprüfung (DIAP)*, which annually is administered by officials sent out from Germany. As indicated, this well established school sector is supplemented by a range of further cultural institutions and initiatives where German speakers play important and even dominant roles. An umbrella organisation for these activities is the German Cultural Council (*Deutscher Kulturrat*). All these efforts and activities, remarkable for a community of limited size, reinforce both solidarity within and boundary maintenance towards outsiders.¹⁴ Not least, this attitude finds expression in the image of present-day Germany that is regularly reported by observers to prevail amongst *Südwesters*. In early 2012, a letter to the *AZ* succinctly expressed this frame of mind in the language of a problem pertaining to emigrants from Germany more generally:

We emigrants, we strive to keep up everywhere in the world the beautiful German traditions and virtues which have been taught to us, and to pass them on to our children. I am quite solidly convinced that it will be only a question of a relatively

¹⁴ For an excellent general treatment of the basics of such processes, see Brubaker 2002.

short time before there will be more Germany abroad than in Germany itself – and this will be all the more persistent.¹⁵

As indicated, specific *Südwest* discourse adds to this the claim of being rooted in Africa, while at the same time claiming to keep up virtues and traditions that are said to have corroded in metropolitan Germany and include, besides various aspects of tight discipline, a clearly nationalist frame of mind. Significantly, while not disowning Namibia – even in harsh criticism of the incumbent government – such nationalism relates above all to ‘German-ness’ (*Deutschtum*). It may appear difficult to blend these two stances. German nationalism and a claim to an African identity may at first appear hard to reconcile. However, this operation can also function as a kind of immunising device: Speakers are in a position to deny ‘German’ responsibility for the Holocaust and indeed, the colonial genocide in Namibia, while at the same time fielding classical sentiments about the need for a ‘final stroke’, a decision no longer to be bothered with the issue; those who take up these topics and possibly even see some linkage between them are blamed of appropriating ‘African’ history to ‘German’ concerns.

As Schmidt-Lauber (1998: 250–61, *passim*) has shown persuasively and in great detail, the expectation to conform to all this, along with attendant rules and attitudes, is enforced by social pressure, because ‘we *Südwesters*, we must stand together’.¹⁶ Schmidt-Lauber also describes how this code of behaviour is conveyed almost immediately to new arrivals who are briefed about the ‘do’s and don’ts’ and also about how to fit in into the community, which they are considered somehow to be a natural part of, on account of their German provenance. However, the tight bonds of grouping make it difficult and costly, in some ways even risky, to opt out of community affiliation, thus jeopardising personal relationships and possible existing business connections.

Group cohesion may be enhanced further by a feeling that the group, possibly more than individual members, finds itself in a precarious position. This perception finds reference in the real and perceived dangers at important turning points, such as actual or threatened deportation or repatriation in the immediate aftermath of both World Wars, or internment during World War II. However, such sentiments have been articulated much more recently, for example, after more than two decades of Namibian independence, in the martial, though metaphorically misplaced call to Namibian German speakers to be a ‘hammer of our own destiny’, meaning that in the past, the community suffered as a subjected minority and now should come forward in a more pro-active way. These aggressive words, uttered by Harald Koch, the Chairman of the *Deutscher Kulturrat*, at the centenary of the Windhoek Rider Statue in January, 2012,¹⁷ resonated with self-pity in a letter to the editor two years later,

15 Letter by Horst Gonschorek, writing from Canada, AZ, 20.1.2012, in the context of the letter by a form in a Berlin school, see more extensive reference in ch. 5, (own translation).

16 A common trope to be heard in casual conversation, e.g. when someone asks a favour.

17 As quoted in Fischer 2012a; a letter to the AZ editors (by Agnes Hoffmann, AZ 7.3.2012) couches these sentiments in the form of lack of acceptance by other Namibians; see also ch. 6.

when the final removal of the Rider was associated with the question whether 'one knows, as a German, whether one can still feel secure'.¹⁸

Although it may be hard to substantiate or verify such claims and complaints, they display one further feature of prevailing *Südwester* discourse. The projection of one's own group as somehow oppressed, vulnerable and given over to powers and vicissitudes beyond their control strengthens the need for persuasion to 'stick together'. However, this only works on condition that any reference to or thought about the *Südwester*s' own involvement or entanglement with colonialism is firmly repressed.¹⁹

Prevailing identity constructs among German speakers in Namibia, then, are highly relevant to current memory politics. It seems that the overriding concern with group cohesion still largely obliterates any potential differences of viewpoints, at least as far as they are articulated in public. Therefore, the community acts and functions not much differently from German speakers during the 1920s, as observed above. Over the decades of close alignment with Apartheid politics and strong anti-communist as well as ethnicist sentiments, there was little reason to question existing nationalist convictions.

Thus, *Südwester*s experienced little compared to what at least a sizeable number of groups in metropolitan Germany found themselves confronted with: a responsibility to come to terms with the state-sponsored mass crimes perpetrated during the first half of the 20th Century (Messerschmidt 2009). As mentioned, responsibility, mediated by continuities of state and society, must not be equated with personal guilt. However, as we have seen (ch. 2), in Germany such responsibility, also re-enforced by the resolve to let such horrors never happen again, proved, against strong odds, to be a force that transformed the public mind to a considerable extent.

From this perspective, it may be said that there is a significant absence in the mental and ideological trajectory of Namibian German speakers in contradistinction to those of metropolitan (West) Germany. In Germany, an intricate web of silences, taboos and repressive reactions first eliminated or at least marginalised from the public realm the more blatant features of Nazi ideology such as open anti-Semitism. One might surmise that this set a scene for later advances in terms of engaging the past over and above a silent agreement that some things should not be talked about.²⁰ The deficiencies of this halting journey towards confronting a dire past have been lamented by many a critical mind in Germany. However, the absence of even this deeply ambivalent process may well have enhanced, among the small and tightly-knit community of Namibian German speakers, a sense of legitimacy for retrograde visions of the past and present that include and intersect with overt racism and Nazi nostalgia. This clearly sets *Südwester* thinking apart from what became the mainstream in Germany – with all its variations and contradictions.

18 AZ, 29.1.2014 (Sonja Stoegmüller); similarly, AZ 24.1.2014, Susanne & Helmut Lessing (Berlin).

19 See close of ch. 6 for most recent articulations of such sentiments on the occasion of the removal of the Windhoek Rider Statue in late 2013.

20 König 2008, pp. 522–31; König refers to the term '*kommunikatives Beschweigen*' (Lübbe 1983: 594).

The persistence of 'German nationalist' sentiment

In this way, commonalities and continuities exist among large sections of German speakers in Namibia with an ideological stance that may be considered broadly as 'German nationalist' (*deutschnational*), and which historically and currently overlaps with right wing positions reaching as far as Nazism. More specifically, for its members, belonging to the group of Namibian German speakers or *Südwesters* takes precedence over political stances. The stances considered acceptable to those identifying with the ethnic group, seem to include criminal ones such as Nazism²¹.

Such feelings are connected readily with the claim to a separate identity as *Südwesters*. If one delves into the not so distant past, the openness in articulating Nazi sentiment is sometimes stunning. If in the mid-1950s, a German speaking farmer banished a Rhenish missionary from his farm because the missionary questioned the picture of Hitler in the drawing room and contradicted the farmer's Nazi sentiments (Gockel 2012: 146), such attitudes were linked to a strong assertion of the colour line. The report of a West German investigative journalist who in 1978 joined a tourist group organised by the rightist 'Assistance Committee Southern Africa' provides a good example.²² Stunned by his experiences at an evening function with extreme rightists in Walvis Bay, a few days later he recorded the following mitigating comment from a German speaker who was currently working for the DTA:

To them, time has stood still. You cannot do politics today with such slogans. Certainly, I also still do have my swastika flag. But of course, I leave it at home! (Mayr 1978: 91).

In this way, the speaker took it as a matter of course for a 'German' to own a swastika flag and keep it – then as now an illegal act in Germany. To this 'moderate' German speaking Namibian, it was merely a matter of expediency not to show the flag publicly. Unsurprisingly, during the 1980s, while South Africa strove for a unilateral independence deal in Namibia, Nazi related activities were still fairly evident in Namibia. Thus, the *Windhoeker Buchhandlung* sold swastika stickers (TN 25.7.1986). On the occasion of the death of Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess in Spandau Prison, 'ethnically conscious (*volksbewusste*) Germans' advertised in the daily *AZ* in honour of a man whom they referred to as the 'last representative of a better Germany'; others took advantage of the occasion to rehearse key Nazi slogans such as, 'Germany must live, though we may have to die' or 'fidelity is my honour's name'.²³ One and a half years later, with the UNTAG process leading up to independence already under way, Hitler's 100th birthday was marked by swastika banners

21 As a citizen, I subscribe to the tenet that Nazism is not an opinion, but a crime; I am aware that in circles dealt with in the text, the opposite is the accepted view and practice.

22 *Hilfskomitee Südliches Afrika*

23 *AZ*, 21.8.1987, 27.8.1987, 16.10.1987.

that were hoisted on public buildings in Swakopmund, and a baker produced buns adorned with swastikas. Typically, the latter incident was played down at the time by the rather liberally minded weekly *Namibia Nachrichten* as a silly escapade; the only worry seemed to be directed at potential consequences for the tourism industry (as quoted in Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 279–80).

More recently, reference to this incident occasioned a scathing response in *AZ* which combined, in typical fashion, the attempt to present the incident as an inconsequential joke with a strongly worded attack on 'super-Germans' – whoever they may be – who supposedly were lecturing preposterously to *Südwester*s.²⁴ In this way, reference to Nazi symbols was presented as quite harmless and at the same time, such reference and condoning attitudes were claimed almost as ethnic markers distinguishing Namibian German speakers from metropolitan Germans. The same logic applies to the ways the *AZ* strives to present itself as steering free of 'extreme rightist historians such as Dr Claus Nordbruch' (Hofmann 2006c), who is notorious for his denialist views not just concerning the genocide in Namibia, but also the Holocaust. In actual fact, Nordbruch is presented by the same journalist as part of the fold of German speakers in a report about the Windhoek carnival, where Nordbruch appeared as one of the speakers ritually cracking jokes (Hofmann 2006b). From this perspective, a person's openly proclaimed Nazi views are not seen as a reason for ostracism; rather, such people are still seen and treated as a part of the community, and belonging to the community takes precedence over other considerations. As in the instance cited above, this approach is actually claimed as a means of border maintenance (Barth 1969: 15–6, 22–8) vis-à-vis metropolitan Germany.

Nazi pronouncements and public downplaying are not limited to the pre-independence past. Thus, in 1995, a Nazi group in Windhoek used activities to mark the 50th anniversary of liberation from Nazi rule in Germany to spread their own propaganda. Leaflets with text, apparently originating in Germany, but under the letterhead of the Namibian–German Foundation which was organising a series of events on this important date, were left on cars during the foundation's evening functions.²⁵

Again, on the occasion of the decease of Simon Wiesenthal, the Holocaust survivor who had spent his life after being liberated hunting down Nazi perpetrators, the bilingual (English & German) weekly *PLUS*, distributed free of charge in supermarkets, carried an advertisement slandering Wiesenthal as an 'eyesore of humanity'.²⁶ To be sure, this time there was an immediate outcry, not only by the German ambassador, writing in the *AZ*, but also from the editors of this medium of central importance to German speakers in Namibia; a majority of the writers of letters to the editor chimed in. However, Hans Feddersen, the editor of the weekly and a former editor of *AZ*, apologised in the customary ambidextrous fashion,

24 Review of du Pisani et al. 2010, *AZ*, 21.6.2010.

25 See reporting in *TN*, 3-7.4.1995, documented on <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/37/002.html> (accessed 12.12.2012); thanks to Henning Melber, Uppsala, for this reference.

26 *PLUS*, 23.9.2005, as quoted in Kössler 2008a: 320; the internet documentation cited there is no longer available. Thanks to Joachim Zeller, Berlin, for support.

as though a practical joke had gone astray, musing on the idea that to deny Hitler or Saddam Hussein the 'right to live', was just as bad as to deny it to Wiesenthal.²⁷ Exactly this kind of attitude was then taken up on right-wing websites from Germany, who openly reproached the AZ, obviously for having deviated from supposedly upright national sentiment and bemoaned Feddersen's 'moral weakness' for having acceded at all to an apology. The article went on to challenge the ambassador in a sardonic manner to 'champion German interest the same way as he does Jewish interest' and to doubt such a perspective on the grounds of the recent 'increase of development aid for Namibia in terms of indemnity for the putting down of the Herero rising 1904.'²⁸

Apart from its unpalatable dressing and content, the episode demonstrates two decisive points: a constant interplay between broadly like-minded circles in Namibia and in Germany, and a very ready reference to the genocide of 1904–08 as a persistent central topic, both of colonial history in Namibia *and* for memory of a colonial past, as far as such memory exists, in Germany. These features will be explored in more detail in the following chapter as the Namibian connection in denialism. If the attitude just outlined, viewed leniently, appears to be one of irresponsible light-heartedness, the issue acquires its full weight and importance when we consider the denialist drive in more detail.

²⁷ *PLUS*, 2.10.2005.

²⁸ As quoted in Kössler 2008a: 320; the internet documentation cited there is no longer available.

5

The Namibian Connection in Denialism¹

*Die Idiotie alles dessen ist wirklich Zeichen eines
psychisch Nichtbewältigten, einer Wunde, obwohl
der Gedanke an Wunden eher den Opfern gelten sollte.²*

Theodor W. Adorno

THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE POSTCOLONIAL RELATIONSHIP THAT EXISTS between Namibia and Germany is multi-faceted. One of these aspects – not necessarily the most publicised – concerns us here in particular: the ways in which denialist views regarding the colonial genocide are aired and exchanged among interested groups and individuals. This chapter is not only concerned with providing insight into these networks, but following the vacillating arguments also requires an understanding of the underlying discourse in which denial of the genocide is conveyed. Such an undertaking entails detailed engagement with at least some exemplary texts, to unravel argumentative strategies. Inevitably, factual as well as methodological flaws need to be discussed at some length. Furthermore, I hope to convey the importance of the denialist connection as well as the risks it carries for any resolution of the underlying conflict that deals constructively with the heritage of genocide.

For many in southern and central Namibia, the Namibian War, and in the last analysis, the genocide, is a constant presence. As we have seen, the consequences of the genocide of 1904–08 lie at the heart of present-day land problems and inequality in land ownership

¹ This chapter builds on Kössler 2008a: 320–8, which has been considerably expanded.

² ‘The idiocy of all this is an indication of something that has not been dealt with in psychological terms, of a wound, even though thinking of wounds should relate more to the victims.’

in central and southern Namibia. These consequences of the genocide are important influences on identity constructions both of black Namibians and of German speakers in the region. They continue to frame the everyday outlook and mind-sets of Namibians, who relate to those regions as their home in fundamental, if clearly distinct and diverse ways. Constructs of 'home' or 'belonging'³ may refer to ancestral lands lost to the thrust of settler colonialism, but also to a farm that has been handed down for three or four generations, including the graveyard on the premises, or a farm that was bought a few decades ago, or acquired through various forms of affirmative action.⁴ In this way, land and its skewed distribution, regardless of the doubtful viability of commercial agriculture in the region (Sherbourne 2004), forms a powerful symbolic linchpin for collective claims and aspirations. Land issues re-enforce the vital meaning of the genocide for diverse and often opposed claims and identity constructions in the region. The land crisis since late 2014 highlights reasons why the events of more than a century ago still loom large in the public mind in these parts of Namibia. This issue has gained in prominence over the last decade or so. Time and again, the problem has been articulated in opposing stances towards the genocide itself.

In this chapter, I want to shed light in particular on the discursive strategies of those among German speaking Namibians, as well as among some German rightists, historians and social scientists, who contest that genocide took place in Namibia at the beginning of the 20th Century. This is not to place these very diverse actor groups on a par with each other. Rather, one of the tasks of this chapter is to help unravel the relations that exist or come into being between scholarly endeavours, and how they are put to political ends.

Sometimes, such relationships between scholarship and politics come about and work in untoward and unexpected ways. The following pages will address a political situation which thoughtful observers increasingly view as volatile or even potentially inflammable. The resulting fears rest precisely on the fact that the issue of genocide and its strong relations to the land question coalesce here with the pervasive and as yet unresolved issue of gross social inequality in postcolonial Namibia. This perspective entails a specific responsibility for scholars in the field to weigh their arguments as well as their words, regardless of their conclusions. The task of clarifying these issues involves following the diverse arguments. Demonstrating the flimsiness of some statements may appear tedious, but I consider this a necessary exercise, because such claims and arguments resurface in unexpected places and may have important ramifications (see also ch. 11).

3 See the critical treatments of this concept by Geschiere 2009, 2011 and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011, 2012.

4 For the latter, see the cases of a newly arrived German speaking farmer, and of black Namibians who acquired farms under loan or resettlement schemes, in the video documentation *Land Matters* by Thorsten Schütte, see <http://www.landmatters.de/> (accessed 31.1.2014). The overall and pervasive mind-frame connected with owning a piece of land finds expression in Von Wietersheim 2008. The title of this book turns the inclusive meaning conveyed in Bruce Springsteen's famous song opening 'This land is your land, this land is my land' into an exclusive notion referring to a piece of land privately owned instead of the national territory. A similar point is made by Melber (2014c: 34–6).

FACTS, CONTEXT AND DENIAL

One important dimension of the debate around the genocide concerns Namibia's role as a prime tourist destination, especially for tourists coming from Germany. Besides an interest in viewing nature and in particular the 'Big Five', many are attracted by supposedly 'German' features of colonial buildings or by the town of Swakopmund, as well as to an extent by battle sites. Among these, the emblematic site at the Waterberg stands out, since it offers in addition a fascinating nature experience. Larissa Förster (2010: pt 1) has investigated this unique memory landscape in depth and shown how the images and memories of German speaking farmers in the immediate vicinity of the Waterberg differ starkly from those of Ovaherero living mainly in Okakarara and the communal area directly adjacent to the east. She also delved into the perceptions and attitudes of tourists who stayed at the farms of German speakers and visited the battlefield. Apparently, through such visits, remembrance in connection with the Waterberg functions as a kind of sounding board for sentiments going back and forth between specific groups in Germany and other German speaking Namibian groups.⁵ Förster (2010: 103–7) found that German tourists showed strong sentiments regarding the exploits of German soldiers in 1904. Significantly, battlefield tourists did not take into account the consequences of the war for Africans. What mattered to them was savouring the supposedly authentic atmosphere and if possible, picking up the odd ammunition shell from the ground. This behaviour conveys enthusiasm for the military, and possibly, nostalgia for imperial glory.⁶ As Förster observes, the largest groups of tourists at the Waterberg are drawn from the Namibian *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kriegsgräberfürsorge*⁷ and from Germany. Most of these visitors are members of 'colonial apologist associations' (Förster 2010: 105).

Concerns with detail and authenticity can also be found in public articulations of views on the colonial past. The German language daily *AZ* serves as a clearing house for such debates and characteristically carries a remarkable number of readers' letters that concern the Namibian War (besides all kinds of general matters and issues related to tourism). The overwhelming majority of these letters refute the idea that this war involved genocide. All kinds of occurrences and conjunctures occasion threads of mutually enforcing commentaries and readers' letters. Thus, events such as parliamentary initiatives in Germany, pronouncements by prominent visitors from Germany, anniversaries, or the restitution of human remains by Germany in September/October 2011, or the removal of the Rider Statue in Windhoek in late 2013 spark intense discussion and exchange. These letters to the editor arrive from all over the world, mainly – but not exclusively – from German speaking countries besides Namibia. Some of these exchanges will be dealt with below in more detail.

5 Of course, such interests and concerns are directed at other historic war sites and battlefields as well, where even more elaborate practices, such as large-scale re-enactment, are observed (see e.g. Petermann 2007).

6 A locally produced series of pamphlets on colonial topics is put out by *Glanz und Gloria Verlag* (Shining Glory Publishers).

7 Working Group for the care of war gravesides.

However, a common convergence point is the preoccupation with refuting what commonly is addressed as the 'genocide thesis'. Such efforts have been reflected consistently in the AZ, but have also found expressions in other forms. These more extensive expositions of the denialist stance warrant careful examination, to explore some of their logic and interrelationships.

The basic approach in this denialist discourse and attendant literature involves mustering a plethora of detailed information about troop movements, weaponry and geographical features of the region. This line of argument is reflected most extensively and in exemplary fashion by the writings of H.R. Schneider-Waterberg (2005/2011), to whom we shall return. At first glance, both the AZ and Schneider-Waterberg join hands with colonial traditionalists in Germany in the obvious belief that historiography amounts to a mere accumulation of facts and could realistically aim for Leopold von Ranke's idea of rendering history 'as it has actually been'. In purely academic terms, therefore, the polemical statement of German historian Christoph Marx, that this conception of history takes us back to the year 1830, is as valid as is his assessment of the AZ as basically a provincial paper (2005: 143). In this case, epistemological naiveté links with the overriding denialist thrust. Further linkages emerge between denialist stands concerning the genocide of 1904–08 and those concerning the Holocaust, or more broadly between attitudes that call for an end to recalling the past or a 'final stroke', as articulated in (West) Germany continuously since 1945 (Frei 2005, 1996). Furthermore, these epistemic communities exist both in Germany and in Namibia, and they extend from some academic quarters into extreme right wing circles.

The general attitude that prevails in these quarters came to the fore in an enraged response on a colonial traditionalist internet forum, which ostensibly is focused on former colonies but is in fact closely connected to the German extreme right.⁸ The occasion was an article in the left liberal daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*, bemoaning the prevalent use by school students in Germany of right wing, traditionalist websites as sources of information on German colonialism (Geyer 2006). Contributions to the forum⁹ argued that the 'best facts' were to be had from 'contemporary' books – leaving open what use historical analysis might have at all. Others voiced interest in knowing 'how and who [sic] was governor of Togo in 1908, which rank one's great-grandfather on the old photograph had, or how [sic] the flag of the Jaluit Society looked like'. Related websites¹⁰ convey a focus, besides achievements such as infrastructure and agriculture, on the 'last button on a litevka', but they studiously 'leave unmentioned the African victims' of German colonial rule (Geyer 2006). By displaying merry

8 See Böhlke-Itzen & Zeller 2006.

9 http://www.forumromanum.de/member/forum/forum.php?action=std_show&entryid=1096528025&USER=user_21216&threadid=2&onsearch=1 (accessed 22.11.2012); now merged into Forum deutsche Kolonialgeschichte <http://www.traditionsverband.de/forum/> (accessed 22.11.2012).

10 www.deutsche-schutzgebiete.de/deutsche-kolonien.htm <http://www.traditionsverband.de>; <http://www.jaduland.de/kolonien> (all accessed 7.11.2012); in its section devoted to Namibia, (<http://www.jaduland.de/kolonien/afrika/suedwest/index.html>), jaduland stands out by a total obliteration of the Namibian war, apparently a corollary of its stressing its anti-Nazi stance – better not address the ticklish issues (accessed 2.12.2012); http://www.uni-protokolle.de/Lexikon/Deutsche_Kolonien.html (accessed 2.12.2012) presents 'pure' facts about administrative structure or *Schutztruppe* contingents.

people, including an African and a Chinese boy, waving black-white-and-red flags and their top hats, the reality of colonialism is obscured and rendered banal.¹¹

To safeguard such 'cosy' views of the past, a contribution in the mentioned internet forum employs a more or less routine trope and warns of 'German self-hate' as the reason for dealing with colonial atrocities and genocide. It should be noted that this preoccupation with the denial of genocide merges with denialism in relation to the Holocaust. This is aired in the letters to the editor of the *AZ* (e.g. Friedrich 2006), or linked to the complaint that under the heading of *Auschwitzlüge*, publication of such views is outlawed in Germany, as in a contribution to the above-cited internet forum.

In view of such obsession with 'mere' facts or even the 'best' facts, we remind ourselves that the writing of history or the rendering of social reality inevitably presupposes a reduction of complexity and thereby cannot be expected to result in a full representation of all facts and materials, which obviously would overtax human capacity;¹² in colloquial German parlance, one may also point to the danger of overlooking the forest precisely by focusing on all the individual trees. Furthermore, as acknowledged for more than a century, such intellectual procedures are predicated upon the interest or 'value ideas' which lie at the basis of any intellectual undertaking since they provide indispensable perspective.¹³ Undaunted by such considerations, proponents of the purely factual approach eagerly seize upon a provocative wording of this simple, if sobering, insight into the limits of intellectual engagement with the past (Melber 2005c: 10), or even upon the mere statement that history writing is an interpretative (or hermeneutic) business (Kössler 2005c: 52–53). They conflate a clear statement of perspective, which may have the implication of taking sides, with narrow partiality of analysis, while such partiality has been refuted explicitly in this case (Zollmann 2007: 114–5 on Kössler 2005c: 77). The claim which underlies such argument purports to be the possession of some objective truth by the mere 'collection and publication of materials' (Hofmann 2006a). The very brief remarks above should have made clear that such suppositions are naïve in epistemological terms and by this very token grossly overdraw what is humanly possible. Claims to 'truth' based on such suppositions appear boastful from a more sober perspective. As we shall see presently, such considerations do not imply that facts cannot be ascertained. More surprising is the impudence of the advocates of 'pure facts' when it comes to producing facts that suit their argument.

11 <http://www.deutsche-schutzgebiete.de/deutsche-kolonien.htm> (accessed 7.11.2012; this website, catering to a wide range of interests in Wilhelminian nostalgia, warrants a separate analysis).

12 Gehlen 1986: 35–46, 62–73; more specifically on the inescapable forgetting and selection involved in memory see Dimbath 2014, who on pp. 87–91 also refers to such observations occurring since classical antiquity.

13 Weber 1904: 180–181. As space does not allow me to expound my own position here, suffice it to say that I entertain doubts on the possibility of a neat division along Weber's lines, between such value ideas and value judgements. Still, I consider it important to be guided by him towards clarity about what one is doing in each particular context. The subject matter treated here makes a neat separation particularly difficult, since debate is charged, not only with emotion, but also with strong and historically grounded normative convictions (or 'value ideas') that inform such emotions, as they do, in principle, in any scholarly endeavour.

CERTAINTIES, UNCERTAINTIES, AND FALSIFICATIONS

The naïve historical realism that prevails in the colonialist websites is also replicated by H.R. Schneider-Waterberg, by now the most prolific writer in the denialist camp. In 2005, he published a collection of articles which were reissued in a considerably expanded version six years later. Schneider-Waterberg explicitly lays claim to relaying the ‘purely factual . . . “as it actually has taken place (*wie es denn wirklich gewesen sei*)”’ (2011: 14), or he claims to present ‘facts unencumbered by ideology’ (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 195). In particular Schneider-Waterberg’s more recent interventions warrant some closer attention: Here, a line of argument emerges over and above the tendency to accumulate and recount mere factual detail. However, a close reading of his effort to breach ‘a pathway for truth’, as the title of his book may be rendered, leaves one somewhat bewildered, not least since some of his statements show considerable internal contradictions. This may be due to the period of some seven or eight years that elapsed between the writing of the various items. A closer engagement with this argument will also unveil statements of highly doubtful veracity that are noteworthy within the context of an on-going controversy and political contention.

In the following section, therefore, I try to tease out the writer’s main argument. Schneider-Waterberg presents his thinking at times in quite aggressive, polemical language. He blames his adversaries for falsification, forgery and purposeful elision, which he sees obviously counterpoised to his own claim to convey factual truth, or in the words of a very sympathetic reviewer, as one of the historians ‘who form their view of history along the course of events, by controllable facts and critically examined sources’ (AZ 20.1.2012). Given the outright liberties concerning adherence to factual and textual truth which the author has allowed for himself, another German proverb applies: ‘Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones.’¹⁴

Significantly, Schneider-Waterberg aligns himself with a much debated contribution by the late Brigitte Lau (1995b), otherwise one of the proponents of anti-colonial historiography in Namibia during the 1970s to 1990s. Schneider-Waterberg has included a German version of Lau’s contribution in his own book (2011: 141–59), and he replicates much of Lau’s basic argument. However, this alliance is not without its own contradictions. Basically, Lau bemoaned the prevailing framing of Africans as victims in much of the relevant literature. As emerges from her reply to one critic, Lau somehow construed ‘genocide’ as a term that deprived victims of their agency, and thus could not describe the admittedly tragic fate of a ‘proud nation’ (1995b: 51). She linked these views to questioning the received numbers of those who perished after the battle of Ohamakari and claimed that many Ovaherero had in fact used their intimate knowledge of the country to make their way towards safe havens in the east and north (Lau 1995b: 43–46). Nevertheless, Lau saw this as ‘one of the darkest and saddest periods of Namibian history’. Moreover, she stressed the ineptitude of a German military who, in addition to a range of shortcomings, had been beset by pervasive disease (1995: 47–50).

¹⁴ ‘*Wer im Glashauss sitzt, soll nicht mit Steinen werfen*’.

Lau's central concern relates to what she considered Eurocentrism in the sense of projecting 'the total dominance of the colonisers' and thus obliterating African agency.¹⁵ In rather opaque ways, Lau linked this important concern to a 'perverse resurrect[ion]' of the 'Nazi German "Aryan" hero', by which, in Lau's view, 'the total militarisation of the country by South Africa' during the liberation war of the 1980s 'is neatly taken off South Africa's contemporary shoulders and placed at the doorstep of those turn-of-the century [sic] colonisers' (1995: 38). Lau's further reasoning is that these colonisers, on account of their own inherent weakness, were in fact incapable of exerting such coherent and systematic violence.

One can argue that such reasoning was underpinned by a specific nationalist, Namibian, historical narrative that, among other considerations, contrasted German efforts to construct a more or less self-contained colony to the South African strategy of incorporating Namibia and subjugating it to South African needs.¹⁶ It is also true that in some recent writing an implied tendency to exonerate South Africa for its oppressive and largely illegal rule in Namibia may indeed be suspected.¹⁷ However, such reasoning risks falling into the trap of playing off one form of colonialism against the other and thus losing sight of the fundamental issue of colonialism as such.¹⁸

Apart from this framework, the factual basis of Lau's claims proves brittle at best. In a balanced and carefully worded exercise, with a point by point examination of Lau's paper, Werner Hillebrecht,¹⁹ her successor as Chief Archivist at the National Archives of Namibia, has demonstrated in particular that Lau's claims rest on extremely shaky ground. To a considerable extent, this may be attributed to a disregard for the holdings of the very archives she was head of, and at the same time, due to reliance on the work of Sudholt (1975), a known rightist, as conveyed by Poewe (1985). Sudholt bases his argument on scanty archival sources and a very restricted number of interviews conducted in Windhoek during the 1960s, exclusively with German speakers, while Poewe builds on Sudholt's claims and adds views that label 'the entire Herero society since the war in terms of psychopathology', which Hillebrecht considers a form of effective self-marginalisation within the academy.²⁰

15 Lau 1995: 39; for discussion on this important point, see Kössler 2008a: 325; Hillebrecht 2007: 75; Krüger 1999: 12–5, 67, 71–2, 129–30, 2003: 127–8.

16 As argued by Hillebrecht (2007: 91) with reference to Lau's work on agricultural and water issues (Lau & Reiner 1993; Lau & Stern 1990).

17 Kössler 2012a on Sarkin 2011.

18 As is also the case with all too ready embracing of the controversial Blue Book; see Kössler 2004a.

19 Hillebrecht 2007; without giving a page reference, Schneider-Waterberg claims that Hillebrecht 'describes Lau as "shabby, tendentious, unscientific and a crown witness of a shady array of unrepentant colonialists and Neonazis"' (2011: 291, fn. 101). The wording, given as a verbal quote from Hillebrecht, is nowhere to be found in his text and completely counters the author's pervasive and palpable effort to provide an understanding for Lau's text, which he considers deeply disquieting since it has 'gone horribly wrong', even though from 'laudable objectives' (2007: 91).

20 Hillebrecht 2007: 79; this assessment does not impinge in principle on the legitimacy or necessity of addressing the issue of trauma after genocide, but certainly points to ruses that link argument about trauma to denialist strategies, and in so doing, essentialise trauma in ethnicist fashion.

THE DENIALIST ARGUMENT STEERING CLEAR OF UNWELCOME SOURCES

At first glance, Schneider-Waterberg recapitulates Lau's argument. Closer inspection shows that he does so only within clearly cut limits. Schneider-Waterberg advances four core claims: He denies a factual basis for considering what happened in 1904 as genocide; he shoves Trotha's infamous Proclamation of 2 October 1904 aside as a mere instrument of psychological warfare with no practical relevance; he attacks Drechsler's (1966) work as a Stalinist concoction, supposedly largely based on the South African Blue Book of 1918 (Gewald & Silvester 2003); finally, he expands on Lau's assertion that Eurocentrism and sheer ignorance of local conditions blinded 'northern', in particular metropolitan German (East and West), scholars from appreciating the natural environment. For example, the environment supposedly had not allowed the purported number of Ovaherero cattle to be concentrated in the Waterberg region during July and August 1904, but had made it possible for large numbers of Ovaherero to pass through the Omaheke after the battle of 11 August, 1904.

The first element in Schneider-Waterberg's argument replicates the numbers game already exercised by Lau (1995b: 43–6). This is an attempt to minimise the numbers of Ovaherero living in central Namibia at the beginning of 1904, to maximise the numbers of survivors, and thereby to minimise the numbers of victims during the war and also possibly the numbers of those who perished in the concentration camps. As noted by Hillebrecht, such an exercise is 'painfully reminiscent of the line of reasoning of the deniers of the Holocaust, the proponents of the "Auschwitz lie" argument' (2007: 80). On this kind of reasoning, social philosopher Theodor W. Adorno (1964: 126) remarked that it is 'hard to grasp that people are not ashamed to argue that at most five million Jews had been gassed instead of six million', which betrays 'a lack of emotional commitment in the most serious of matters'. Hillebrecht has also assembled an array of informed estimates that justify adherence to a number of 60–80,000 Ovaherero living in central Namibia before the war (2007: 82), and he points to a neglected census figure putting the number of Ovaherero on 1 January 1911 at 19,423. Still, as Hillebrecht insists, at the very least, such a body count is a macabre exercise. Furthermore, documenting 'the terrible toll the war has taken from the Herero people' in terms of more or less exact numbers of who perished is really beside the point, given the manifest intent on the side of the German command in Namibia and their superiors in Berlin to annihilate the group, as well as the obviously very effective ways and means to do so (Hillebrecht 2007: 83).

In terms of such intent, some of the most obvious and most frequently cited proofs for the genocide are the self-indictments by German officialdom. This is the second pillar of Schneider-Waterberg's argument. Besides Trotha's proclamation of October 2, 1904, the historical account of the German General Staff is important here, since it actually boasts of the genocide perpetrated in the Omaheke (Kriegsgesch. Abt. 1906; see also chs 1 & 3). Schneider-Waterberg tries to dispose of these documents as mere propaganda. He claims that the October 2 Proclamation was directed in some opaque or 'inconsequential' and 'irrelevant' way (2011: 10, 53) at the elusive Ovaherero whom the German troops failed

to trace in the Omaheke. On the other hand, the pronouncements of the General Staff were supposedly directed at the German public to camouflage the actual failure of the decisive battle at Ohamakari on August 11, 1904 as well as the futility of pursuit during the following weeks.

Such reasoning flies in the face of other evidence. This evidence, however, Schneider-Waterberg has studiously ignored. Thus, he ridicules Jürgen Zimmerer's assertion (2005a: 23) that Major Ludwig von Estorff, in his account of his detachment's pursuit of Ovaherero, simply implied in his mention of 'heaps of cattle who had died from thirst' the people who had met the same fate (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 266). Yet Schneider-Waterberg does not address Estorff's obvious horror at what he experienced. Above all, he is silent about Estorff's closing phrase. Here, the Major reports explicitly that he suggested to Trotha that he should save the people and their herds, 'but he was out for their complete annihilation'.²¹

Similar views were voiced by Paul Rohrbach who had arrived in Namibia as settlement commissioner just before the war began, in his published diary (noted under the date of August 16, 1904, i.e. shortly after the battle of Ohamakari and almost two months before Trotha's Proclamation): 'It would be the best thing if now some kind of peace could be concluded with the Hereros, after they have apparently suffered heavy losses in people and cattle, in order to disarm the people and bring them, along with their cattle, back under our rule. Yet according to the officially proclaimed programme of annihilation of General v. Trotha, there is no hope for this'.²²

Rohrbach, who went on to feature as one of the mainstays of German colonial nostalgia and revisionism,²³ also stuck to his assessment in more systematic work. Here, he left no doubt about his own goals and intentions. He saw the problem was rooted in the failure to disarm and expropriate 'the native tribes' in good time, without 'moralising self-deception or vacillating sentimentality' (1909b: 19). With 50 years' hindsight, Rohrbach still bemoaned the role of Trotha who had 'not grasped that in . . . South West Africa, it was not a matter of "annihilating" the natives as enemies, but rather, to safeguard as many of them as possible, along with their cattle . . . South West Africa *with* natives was worth much more for us than *without* natives' (1953: 64). Rohrbach's repeated pronouncements, as well as Estorff's misgivings, come from solid colonialists. Both certainly speak to the fact that annihilation

21 Estorff, no date: 117; Lau 1995b: 51 shrugs off Estorff's account somewhat disingenuously by insisting that it 'fail(s) to posit [the Herero] as passive victims of genocide'; at most, this argument makes sense within Lau's idiosyncratic, if hazy notion of genocide, apparently linked to passive victimhood.

22 1909a: 168; Hull's (2005: 50) interpretation that this diary entry refers to a merely military understanding of annihilation' (*Vernichtung*) is not convincing, also on account of Rohrbach's other writings which stress the economic consequences of the loss of labour power and cattle (see especially 1907: 351–5).

23 From Rohrbach's record and his memoirs (1953), it is clear that he 'justified violent imperialism' (Hull 2005: 330), yet kept his distance from Nazism, which did not prevent him from pushing his views and agenda during the 1930s and also during World War II; Drechsler's characteristic as 'a settler imperialist with a middle-class [*mittelständisch*] background' (1966: 8, p. 17 in the German original) certainly is not far off the mark; other indictments by Drechsler, cited by Schneider-Waterberg (2011: 136 fn. 1), without giving page numbers, cannot be substantiated.

had not been a mere word, nor could it be construed as merely referring to the military tactics of destroying a fighting force.²⁴

As Pool relates, Trotha's strategic intentions, which even at this stage were bent on the annihilation of his enemies in physical terms, are corroborated by his own war diary. Apparently at an early stage, Trotha noted in his exchange with Leutwein: 'SWA is or should be just that colony where the European himself can work to support his family, free from interference but with a fair amount of security.'²⁵ The General argued that 'they [Ovaherero] have to perish in the Sandveld or try to cross the Bechuanaland border'. He claimed he had no choice on account of the constraints he found for his own troops. In a way, this consideration was taken up by Lau. However, Trotha's strong statements 'that the Negro does not respect treaties but only brutal force' and his conviction that 'this revolt is and will remain the beginning of a racial conflict' line up with such reasoning.²⁶ Moreover, Pool states that Trotha's subsequent submissions in 1909 'that he merely meant his proclamation to make the Hereros understand that their period of domination was over, was probably the result of the sharp criticism levelled against him. *It certainly did not agree with the facts*' (1991: 275, emphasis by this author).

One may speculate about what may have caused Schneider-Waterberg to cut all these important sources and informed interpretations out of his ideologically 'untainted' version of the events. True to his noble objective, Schneider-Waterberg even has deleted from his reprint of Lau's article the second part of a note she added for the 1995 edition, which refers to 'Herero oral historian Mr G. Zeze' who, in a television interview, left 'little doubt . . . that von Trotha engaged in acts of extreme barbarism towards a number of Herero', which, by themselves, obviously could not represent 'a coherent and implemented colonial policy of genocide' (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: fn. 151; Lau 1995b: 46–47, fn. 10). Apparently, such accounts simply did not fit the kind of truth Schneider-Waterberg is campaigning

24 Schneider-Waterberg (2011: 93–5) joins Lau (1995b: 46) in this claim, (see Hillebrecht 2007: 84–5, 87); the accounts of Estorff and Rohrbach, as partly cited above, refer clearly to annihilation; otherwise, their protest would not have made any sense, since they all considered military victory as indispensable. Elsewhere, Rohrbach pointedly noted that 'annihilation was not meant in the self-evident military sense, i.e. annihilation of the potential to resist, but as actual extinction of the tribe' (1907: 351). Note the argument of processual change in Trotha's strategy advanced by Pool 1991: 243–78; Hull 2005: ch. 5 and more recently, Häussler 2011, 2013, Häussler & Trotha 2012, all of whom do not doubt in any way the genocidal outcome. The latter was seen in direct connection with Trotha's strategy, also by Mission Director Spiecker when visiting the Rhenish Mission stations in the immediate aftermath (Siefkes 2013: 177–8).

25 Pool 1991: 248 quotes Trotha Archives 315, *Abschrift der Tagebücher mit Anlagen und Materialsammlung*, p. 26. It must be noted that this diary is kept in the Trotha family archive with restricted access; remarkably, the accounts of Pool and also of Hull (2005: 53–5) who relies much less on the diary, differ distinctly from the version of Schneider-Waterberg who has also been given access. Obviously, this situation, where an important source is kept from open access by scholars and only made available according to quite unaccountable criteria, is highly abnormal and in urgent need of rectification. For particulars on this diary and its different versions, see Häusler 2011.

26 Pool 1991: 273, as quoted in Trotha Archives 315, *Abschrift der Tagebücher mit Anlagen und Materialsammlung*, pp. 74 & 294. Note that Trotha's reasoning dovetails with contemporary *quid pro quo* arguments in international law that amounted to giving free reign to colonial armies in 'butchering off' those resisting colonial rule (Kössler 2014b; Kleinschmidt 2013: 33).

for, so they are left out. Schneider-Waterberg claims that Gerhard Pool revised his earlier views (Pool 1979) and no longer believed in what Schneider-Waterberg considers ‘window dressing’ by the German General Staff.²⁷ In fact, and also in his later work, Pool explicitly recounts ‘atrocities’ (1991: 276) and summarises Trotha’s aim: ‘The Hereros had to get out of the Schutzgebiet!’ (Pool 1991: 274). Schneider-Waterberg’s failed attempts to exonerate Trotha and the Schutztruppe only end up in leads that underline the exterminatory intent both of the proclamation of October 1904 and of Trotha’s overall approach, as well as his lamentable success in carrying out these intentions.

ANTI-COMMUNISM AS A SAFEGUARD AGAINST RECOGNISING GENOCIDE

Over long stretches of his book, Schneider-Waterberg presents the whole issue of genocide simply as an emanation from the ‘witch kitchen of East German Stalinism’ (2011: 19), and a ‘toxic waste’ (246). He thus attributes any notion of genocide solely to Horst Drechsler (1966), whose account, first published in the GDR and later in an English version with a foreword by Sam Nujoma, was the first historical analysis of German rule in Namibia which could be based on archival sources held in Germany, particularly on the archives of the erstwhile German Colonial Office. As we shall see, Schneider-Waterberg takes a more cautious approach where he deems this appropriate, but by and large he argues on the surmise of contagion, and seems to expect that the issues raised first by Drechsler and later by an array of other authors can be dispensed with on account of some connection with ‘communism’. In colourful language, Schneider-Waterberg claims that this ‘myth’ had been ‘planted in a few sentences’ ‘forty years ago into a dissertation in colonial history as a servile jinn in a tiny bottle . . . Progressive anti-positivist magician’s pupils were only too happy to let it escape from the bottle’. The ‘redeeming magic words’ to get the jinn back into the bottle then would be ‘But which atrocities?’ (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 19).

One may wonder about the metaphoric language quoted above, or remember that Goethe’s famous magician’s apprentice (any German reader will associate these references immediately) was actually confronted with broomsticks and not with tales from *Arabian Nights*. Remarkably, a ‘tiny bottle’ and ‘a few sentences’ occupy Schneider-Waterberg for more than 200 pages. The main point, however, is the clearly stated, radically denialist objective. In his un-ideological view, there was not only no genocide, there were not even atrocities.

Of course, Drechsler was not the first to address such atrocities. The noted scholar Moritz Bonn, an early critic of colonialism (see Gordon 2013), stated in 1914 that ‘we [i.e. Germany] tried to exterminate a native race, whom our lack of wisdom had goaded into

27 i.e. Kriegsgesch. Abt 1906; see Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 302.

rebellion'.²⁸ Half a century later, Olga Levinson in her popular account (1961: 80) refers to 'the line of flight . . . marked by the dead and dying of countless men, women, children and cattle'.²⁹ During the 1960s, there was public controversy when prominent Ovaherero spokespersons, in particular Clemens Kapuuo, critiqued the annual commemoration of the battle at Ohamakari (Waterberg) by German speakers (Förster 2010: 204–7). The brief but incisive account by Wellington (1967: 206–9) obviously names the facts without making reference to Drechsler, but relying on the eyewitness testimony of Schwabe (1907: 300–6) and Rohrbach (1907: 351). In sum, Drechsler was much more exhaustive and the first to be able to work from primary sources other than memoirs and eyewitness accounts, but he was by no means the first to bring up the issue. Schneider-Waterberg, however, tends to disregard secondary literature not written in German.

The attack on Drechsler is two-pronged. First, Schneider-Waterberg simply tries to defame him as a Marxist, without spelling out what that actually may mean. It seems that references to 'imperialism' or 'big capital' in Drechsler's text are considered sufficient. To prove his indictment, Schneider-Waterberg refers to the first pages of Drechsler's introduction.³⁰ Of course, no serious academic would discard scholarship by authors from the Soviet bloc simply because of some formulae or quotes from Marx or Lenin, or party congresses that were well-known frequently to serve only legitimising purposes, and certainly would not disqualify a serious, source-based account.³¹ No one other than Lau has recognised that Drechsler's 'account is . . . well-researched' and 'very thorough' work, even in her attack on received 'certainties' (1995b: 42, 45) and thus, this assessment has also been included in Schneider-Waterberg's own book (2011: 145, 149). He himself refers to Drechsler's 'meticulous study of the files' and 'very careful search in the archives in Potsdam' (2011: 33, fn. 1, 149).

All this does not deter the author from presenting Drechsler's indictment of genocide as based chiefly on the account of the General Staff and the Blue Book as his 'main support' (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 229). Furthermore, Schneider-Waterberg criticises one inconsistency in dates about the offer for peace by Salatiel Kambazembi, which he claims took place in July, not in October, thus refuting Leutwein's claims that Trotha had repudiated a peace offer (2011: 105). Yet this seems a contentious issue, and in any case, is not the only

28 Moritz Bonn, 'German Colonial Policy,' *United Empire Magazine* V (1914), p. 133, as quoted in Beer 1923: 15; this refers to the papers of the chief of the colonial division of the U.S. delegation at the Versailles Conference; no reference to the Blue Book, which also quotes this (Silvester & Gewald 2003: 180) is made – an indication for a broader debate than is suggested by the sometimes monomaniacal preoccupation with the Blue Book.

29 In a feat of astonishing audacity, Nordbruch (2002: 111, 2004: 190–1) claims that Levinson recanted her account under the impression of 'a storm of protest in the letters pages of the South African and South West African papers'. In any case, Levinson's account in the reworked version of her book (1978: 46–7) has been retained *verbatim*.

30 Drechsler 1966: 1–6; Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 200, apparently mixing up quotes and page numbers.

31 I speak here from my own expertise, having been trained in Eastern European history at the University of Heidelberg in 1967–72.

instance of peace initiatives forestalled.³² All of this does not diminish in any way Trotha's steadfast refusal of anything resembling peace or negotiations, and one would indeed wonder why the emperor's reluctantly given order to rescind the proclamation of October 2, 1904 in Schneider-Waterberg's view opened to Ovaherero the road to 'a saving custody' (2011: 135). If there had been no atrocities, and if the order to shoot on sight had been meaningless, why did people need to be saved? As has been mentioned, the fierce controversies that were raging between Trotha and Leutwein, along with Settlement Commissioner Paul Rohrbach, concerned precisely the issue that Trotha's strategy was bent on annihilating Ovaherero and their cattle, which his critics saw as undermining the future of the settler colony and its economy.

Analysis along these lines had been pioneered by Drechsler (1966: 156–162) and since corroborated by others, who also point to a protracted struggle to rein Trotha in, even prior to August 1904.³³ The attempt to dispose of this overwhelming evidence by insinuating that Drechsler was mainly relying on the Blue Book, while trying to play down the relevance of the Colonial Office files (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 203), is therefore anything but convincing. After all, in the relevant section, Drechsler quotes from the Blue Book only four times, mustering a whole array of other sources besides.

Meanwhile, the Blue Book – while clearly problematic as a source – has been engaged by various other scholars, in particular because it offers rare African testimony.³⁴ Thus, Isabel Hull has shown how these testimonies confirm the indictments found in the diary of Captain Viktor Franke. Franke recounts, among other events, the shooting of women and children even in Trotha's camp. As Hull states, the testimonies from the Blue Book show that Franke's report 'was not idiosyncratic; the indiscriminate shooting of civilians had become common practice'.³⁵ Remarkably, Schneider-Waterberg uses Franke's diary merely to quote the Captain's assessment that further pursuit of the Ovaherero was not feasible, but he disregards the incriminating entries (2011: 267–9). At the same time, Schneider-Waterberg tries, in the tradition of the Prussian military, to designate statements according to status. He contrasts the 'clear statements of three high-ranking officers in good standing and responsible Chiefs of the General Staff' to 'obviously fictitious assertions of two shady

32 Rohrbach's extensive account of possibilities of peace refers to Salatiel's initiative and reports the 'strict order of the [high] command' which 'forbade any negotiations with any Hereros' (1907: 358). This report can hardly be dislodged by reference to a single case that may be dated erroneously. Rohrbach's indictment clearly concerns a coherent and set strategy.

33 cf. Bley 1968: 152–69; also Pool 1979: 251–2; Gewald 1999: 181–2; for English versions of Trotha's proclamation ("*Vernichtungsbefehl*") see Drechsler 1966: 156–7; Bley 1968: 163–4 (commented excerpts); Gewald 1999: 172–3; Zimmerer 2003: 48 (slightly abridged); Wallace 2011: 165 (slightly abridged). The general problem with the proclamation is that no original has been preserved. Drechsler quotes from a letter from Trotha to Bülow from Imperial Colonial Office files; Gewald refers to NAN ZBU D.1.2 Band 3–4, leaf 165. Gewald 1994 reports a roneoed copy in Otjiherero which had been brought to the then Bechuanaland found in the Botswana National Archives.

34 Ngavirue 1997: 185 counts the Blue Book among the features of 'the friendly face shown by the invading [South African] troops' to Africans in Namibia.

35 Hull 2005: 46–52; as quoted 49; Selmici & Henrichsen (1995: 13, 15–16) corroborate the 'independent and credible' statements in the Blue Book by referring to Franke's diary entries.

characters' (2011: 223). Thus, Schneider-Waterberg reduces the ten testimonies contained in the relevant section of the Blue Book (Gewald & Silvester 2003: 113–22) to only two and then does not even make an attempt to substantiate his insinuation in one case, that of Manuel Timbu. In this way, Schneider-Waterberg steers dangerously close to the colonial practice of considering the evidence of Africans to weigh far less than that of white people – apart from the moot question of whether to trust the 'untarnished' honour of military men who made pronouncements such as Trotha or, as Chief of the General Staff Schlieffen did, plotted military attacks against neutral countries in clear defiance of international law – a plan which, in broad outline, was eventually executed against Belgium in 1914 (see Hull 2005: esp. 166).

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE 'EUROPEAN NORTHERN GAZE'

The arguments just reviewed do not exhaust Schneider-Waterberg's repertoire. In ways characteristic of *Südwester* discourse described elsewhere (cf. Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 204–32), Schneider-Waterberg claims superior knowledge. This knowledge appears to be accessible only to locals and pertains both to the natural environments of the Waterberg and the Omaheke towards the east of it, and to the African inhabitants of the region. As Schmidt-Lauber states, ethnographic knowledge about African 'tribes' tends to be merged in *Südwester* discourse with knowledge of nature. In this context, Africans are seen as part of nature, and knowledge of plants and animals appears on a par with that of 'tribes'. Schneider-Waterberg's account dovetails with this analysis. Accordingly, the author is presented in a review in the AZ (20.1.2012), as 'a born Namibian, multilingual, including Otjiherero and residing on historical soil near the Waterberg' – the implications of the latter point being unclear.

Schneider-Waterberg then gives detailed information about the course of the dry rivers that cut through the Omaheke and about water holes not known in 1904 to the German military (2011: 159–61). Remarkably, this account is followed – without comment – by pictures from the author's family photograph collections, showing leading members of the Kambazembi clan with the author's father or with the author as a boy, all on the Schneider-Waterberg farm of Okosongomingo, which of course had once been part of the Kambazembi realm (2011: 162–3). This detour backs up introductory reference to the relationship between the two families (2011: 7), and can only be understood as an effort at self-authentication. Furthermore, he devotes a long section to the particulars of poisonous plants that formerly hindered the practice of grazing in the region (251–6), yet he does not really tell his readers how overcoming these obstacles from the mid-1920s onwards helps to understand the events of 1904. He goes on to provide insights about the networks of wells created by Ovaherero from the late 18th Century onwards, as analysed from different perspectives by Henrichsen (2011) and Lindholm (2006).

Lindholm's archaeological study adds tremendously to our knowledge of the spatial structure of the Omaheke and certainly refutes simplistic conceptions of this region as a desert. Lindholm's main concern is to explode the ideas about distinct peoples and cultures in the Kalahari, and he shows their intersections and fluid boundaries, since for centuries, wells existed that allowed a measure of pastoralism. The Namibian War is integrated into this account. Lindholm agrees that disregard for environmental givens results in 'determinism which effectively succeeds in robbing the Herero and other peoples of Omaheke of their independent action and thought'.³⁶ However, he links this reasoning to the events of 1904 in quite different ways than Lau has initiated, and Schneider-Waterberg would like to suggest that Lindholm himself does. For Lindholm, 'there is firm evidence for considering the campaign of 1904–05 as an attempted genocide', while further debate 'is a question that goes far beyond the scope of this thesis' (2006: 46).

However, Lindholm details possible consequences of particularly dry conditions in October 1904, and he cautions against assessments of the numbers of Ovaherero who reached Bechuanaland on account of prior immigration by Ovaherero to that region, a circumstance that had been disregarded by others (46–7; see also J.A. Müller 2012: 42–5). As long as such earlier movements are overlooked, the numbers of those who successfully crossed the Omaheke in 1904 will be inflated. In his closing chapter, Lindholm refers to the commemoration at Ozombu zOvindimba in October 2004 to mark the centenary of the genocide proclamation, which in his view showed that 'the trauma of the genocide attempt in 1904 created strong historical ties to the area' (2006: 143).

Schneider-Waterberg claims that Lindholm holds it 'not improbable that the strategy of the Omaheke war was employed ad hoc as propaganda to restore the reputation of the German army' (2011: 26). He leaves out the reason Lindholm gives for the loss of such reputation. Actually, Lindholm argues 'that the narrative of a hostile environment may have helped to obscure possible genocidal activities of the *Schutztruppen* [sic]' (2006: 46). Of course, it is legitimate to muster material findings from the works of others, in this case, Lindholm's insight into the network of wells that existed in the Omaheke. It is something entirely different to turn around another author's argument by elision, as Schneider-Waterberg does not only in this case but also in Lau's text cited above, and in his references to Estorff and Franke. This manner of arguing confirms the impression that such an author, as well as others in the denialist camp, are grasping at any straw they can find to bolster their argument, flimsy as that straw may be. When it comes to blaming others of falsification, Schneider-Waterberg finds himself in a glass house shattered by the rocks he has thrown around in such an ill-advised way.

It cannot be ruled out that Schneider-Waterberg would claim that the identification of these severe shortcomings inherent in his argument is due to a 'European Northern gaze' that supposedly limits the vision of those who insist on the record of genocide – or savage

36 Lindholm 2006: 46; he refers to Gewald 1996: 4 who turns this argument *against* Poewe 1985, a mainstay for Lau's (1995) claims; see Hillebrecht 2007 and *supra*. In this way, the argument about Ovaherero agency comes full circle.

atrocities – committed by the *Schutztruppe*. Mainly, he refers to the failure to understand what had been ‘thinkable and indispensable for survival’ from ‘the Southern respectively African perspective of the Herero’. To be sure, this is qualified immediately, if in quite an inconspicuous way, by reference to ‘the leading families’ to whom such feelings are attributed (2011: 297). Schneider-Waterberg then muses on the tenacity of Africans in dealing with a harsh nature, while the continent afforded plenty of open space. Subsequently he briefly refers his readers to ‘oral tradition about the journey of Samuel Maharero to Bechuanaland’. He calls this a ‘haughty and self-serving retreat’ and quotes a saying conveyed to him by Dr Zed Ngavirue, obviously in oral communication: ‘They rode, those with the black necks and the big hats, away into the lonely distance.’ (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 301). This says nothing more than the well-known and undisputed fact that leading Ovaherero made their way to Bechuanaland. The following pages are filled with accounts of various routes taken by chiefly clans. In the process, the deaths of those who did not ride or wear big hats, and who, according to all accounts, numbered in their thousands, somehow dissolve like heavy rain clouds do when the wind blows them over the desert: ‘The Herero’ simply ‘disperse’ or ‘trek away’ (2011: 306). One may wonder why the German troops suffered so terribly from thirst and heat under such conditions and how they could encounter ‘nothing but despondency, death, annihilation’, as Captain Bayer (1909: 163) relates. Again, the horrific scenes reported by German soldiers who reached the Bechuanaland border during the 1905 rainy season (Krüger 1999: 128) go unmentioned.³⁷

THE MEANING OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS

As mentioned above (chs 1, 3 & 4), genocide is not identical to mass killing, nor does it necessarily amount to the absolute extinction of a group. Therefore, the two phases of imprisonment and land alienation, which followed after the end of fighting and after the return of fugitive Ovaherero from the *veld*, form integral parts of the genocidal process. In important ways, this also includes Nama who are entirely left out by those who strive to deny genocide in Namibia. Again, Hillebrecht (2007: 83–4) demolishes Lau’s claim about ‘an alien historical narrative lacking substantiation and factual evidence’ (1995b: 46), by pointing to the actual records ‘in the archives she herself was heading’ (Hillebrecht 2007: 83), and which she seems to have overlooked. Meanwhile, the chilling story of Shark Island has been told by Casper Erichsen (2005, 2008; Olusoga & Erichsen 2010: 207–30). Schneider-Waterberg insists on the ‘military necessity’ of these camps, even though in an early version of his argument, he acknowledged that ‘the drastic war measures . . . still got dangerously close to the inadmissible methods of total war’ (2011: 46). Yet Schneider-

³⁷ For a more recent exercise in ‘proving’ that the Ovaherero simply withdrew at Waterberg which again tries, besides presenting an array of numbers, to interpret Trotha’s Proclamation as mere propaganda, see Tröndle 2012.

Waterberg claims mainly that the massive death toll in the camps was due to a 'scurvy in the form of an epidemic' that could not be dealt with at the time (2011: 328, also 324–7) as well as to other epidemics.³⁸

One of Schneider-Waterberg's prize exhibits is the report by the British Lieutenant, Colonel J.A. Trench, who was attached to Trotha's staff and visited both Swakopmund and Lüderitz during the Namibian War. Schneider-Waterberg quotes from this report a rather favourable assessment of one of the concentration camps in Swakopmund, and even mentions that their inmates were much better off than those in Lüderitz. Trench likened their facilities to the Dantean inferno,³⁹ in other words, a hellish place beyond redemption. Skipping over this clear indictment, Schneider-Waterberg infers from the more favourable impression of one Swakopmund camp, at one particular time, that Trench had not seen the 'early fascist extermination camp of historians Drechsler, Nuhn, Zeller and Zimmerer' (2011: 41).

This language is foreign to the argument of these authors, regardless of their particular assessments which show important differences among them.⁴⁰ Once again, Schneider-Waterberg disregards testimony by persons he otherwise considers as particularly trustworthy. Thus, he asserts that there was no alternative than to accommodate 'uprooted fugitives without means of subsistence' in camps, and in the next sentence refers to 'safeguarding of apprehended warriors' (2011: 48). Schneider-Waterberg mentions Major von Estorff's protests, but quotes him with statements that may appear to qualify such criticism. Still, Estorff's ideas about ending the conflict show that there were people on the ground who did see alternatives. For the Major, camp imprisonment was 'a grave mistake. Kept closely together, in these places, they succumbed to contagious disease and died in their droves'. More importantly, Estorff recalls his attempt to advance a different course of action:

I had tried to bring about a different outcome, by persuading Zacharias, the chief of Otjimbing [we] with the remainders of his tribe and his herds to give themselves

38 Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 35–8; Kreienbaum 2010b: 1023; of course, scurvy is not a contagious disease and talk about an 'epidemic' therefore is quite inaccurate. More importantly, cures – if not the actual causation – had been known for c. 150 years at the time, namely the supply of lemon or lime juice, fresh produce or meat, or *sauerkraut*; see *Encyclopedia Britannica* v 20 (1962), pp. 229–30; more extensively, <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skorbut>; also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scurvy> (both accessed 10.12.2012). Kreienbaum underscores neglect, while repudiating intent with a view to genocide.

39 As quoted in Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 77; see Trench's explicit statement about the Witbooi imprisoned on Shark Island: 'it is not easy to avoid the impression that the extinction of the tribe would be welcomed by the authorities' as quoted in Erichsen 2005: 130 and 120; Olusaga & Erichsen 2010: 220–1. Recently, Grimshaw 2014 has provided a more specific study on the activities and reports by Trench as well by his colleague as military attaché, Major Wade, and other despatches received in London. As Grimshaw notes, these reports provided the British government with 'accurate information . . . [on] every stage of the genocide' (2014: 25). Grimshaw concludes further on with Britain's complicity in effecting Germany's genocidal campaign in GSWA.

40 Drechsler 1966: 207–14 (original 242–51); Nuhn 1994: 306–13; Zeller (2008a); Zimmerer (2008) all provide much more detail about the camps and the general condition of the prisoners than Schneider-Waterberg seems prepared to countenance, but are far from using the term 'early fascist'. Zimmerer does posit that the 'breaking of the ultimate taboo' of extermination was 'first carried out in the colonies' and 'helped to prepare the ground for the Holocaust' (2008: 59–60), but also points out differences.

up to me. I intended to have him settled, certainly under surveillance, in his old territory. The cattle were supposed to become state property, but under his care and usufruct. Such a solution would have been in harmony with the views of the people where only the greatmen owned herds, while the people were caretakers and usufructuarians. . . . But alas, this suggestion was discarded. . . . The general von Trotha even took it out on me. . . . Such sins draw heavy punishment. (Estorff n.d.: 118; emphasis by this author)

The conditions under which prisoners suffered in Swakopmund were exposed at the time by none other than Heinrich Vedder, who then was a young missionary but went on to eminence in the German speaking community and to great authority as an historian and ethnographer,⁴¹ as well as becoming a prominent Nazi sympathiser in the 1930s and a stalwart of Apartheid from the late 1940s onward (see ch. 4). Schneider-Waterberg quotes from Vedder's account about the death of his young child to document the generally poor health conditions in Swakopmund and then takes Joachim Zeller to task for quoting Vedder's reports about the concentration camp,⁴² but later uses the Blue Book in a newspaper article where he doubts Vedder's credibility (Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 35, 63). Schneider-Waterberg does not engage Vedder's detailed reports on the Swakopmund camp or any other source materials used by Zeller. Erichsen is ignored completely, a clear case of ignoring unwelcome evidence.⁴³

HISTORIC LANDGRABBING AND RECONCILIATION

One possible reason for Schneider-Waterberg's questionable ways of searching for truth emerges when we interrogate his text for the third and final dimension of the genocide which is systematically ignored by denialists, the expropriation of African land. Such expropriation meant that any basis for communal existence, let alone restitution, was systematically denied. Schneider-Waterberg addresses this issue in his own unique fashion. He accuses 'the progressive writers of new history' (*Neuhistoriker*) of calling 'land seizure (*Landnahme*) . . . now theft; pioneers were renamed as "settlers" which now was considered as disparaging; and development was now exploitation' (2011: 9). In this way, he obviously takes up the developmentalist justification of colonialism and Apartheid.

There is no English equivalent for the German term *Landnahme*; the word harks back to the times when, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Germanic tribes roamed Europe

41 These credentials have been shattered considerably by Lau 1995a and others.

42 See Zeller 2008: 64–5, 66, 67–8; also Olusaga & Erichsen 2010: 163–5.

43 More such evidence is now available in the print edition of the diaries of Mission Director Spiecker (2013: 142–3, 369, 374–5, 379–81, 386–7, 395) and Siefke's analysis (2013: 179–81); even where Spiecker reports comparatively favourable conditions, he still points to an astounding mortality rate. This observation may also put into perspective the different views on conditions in various concentration camps, see Kreienbaum 2013.

in search of greener pastures and founded their kingdoms from Italy to North Africa; or when, centuries later, the Teutonic Order expanded its realm on the shores of the Baltic Sea. The term conjures up thoughts of war, expansionism and settlement, but also ideas about the legitimacy of territorial expansion, particularly by Germans, which were rife in nationalist circles of the first half of the 20th Century, with well-known implications. In more contemporary parlance, 'landgrabbing' is an appropriate translation. By asserting a difference between such actions and 'theft', Schneider-Waterberg implicitly lays claim to the whole assortment of colonialist mythology about supposedly empty lands that belonged to nobody (*terra nullius*) and at the same time, he claims the right of conquest (Schmidt 2010).

Schneider-Waterberg may not be fully aware of what he is saying, given his advice that in 2004, one should have commemorated, instead of the centenary of the genocide, the 120th anniversary 'of the Imperial-German occupation (*Landnahme*) in what later became German South West Africa and the Berlin ("Congo") Conference of 1884'. This, in his view, would have contributed towards a more 'objective treatment of the issue of colonialism' (2011: 48). It seems that in his claimed 'non-Eurocentric' perspective, what followed from the Berlin Conference was completely peaceful *Landnahme* in the interest of development and progress. There can be little doubt that a majority of Africans hold very different views.

Furthermore, Schneider-Waterberg articulates a conception of reconciliation that seems to be widespread among German speakers in Namibia, justified by a two-pronged argument. First, Schneider-Waterberg (2011: 20–1) objects that a preoccupation with German rule and the genocide obliterates consideration of the much longer period of colonial rule by South Africa and the ravages this wrought. A good number of the authors Schneider-Waterberg takes to task for supposedly playing down South African colonialism are on record for supporting the struggle against Apartheid.⁴⁴ It might be worth investigating at which historical juncture Schneider-Waterberg became a critic of South African occupation in Namibia. Once again, such reasoning risks playing off the crimes of one form of colonialism against another, thus neutralising the main concerns in the criticism of colonialism.

One may doubt, however, that this is the actual concern of Schneider-Waterberg, not only on account of his attitude to the land question. For all his criticism of South African rule, he refers to '60 years of peaceful development (2011: 49) under South African occupation'. A search through Namibian history in the 20th Century does not clearly reveal when such a period might begin or end. If it starts in 1907, the official end of hostilities in the Namibian War, it would take us to the mid-1960s and the beginning of the liberation war in 1966. However, such 'peace' would then be punctured not only by the South African military occupation in 1914–15, but also by the South African

⁴⁴ Significantly, Schneider-Waterberg does not engage the work of Namibian – and Otjiherero speaking – authors who opposed South African rule, such as Kaire Mbuende (1986); Peter Katjavivi (1986, 1988) or Zedekia Ngavirue (1997). On the role of Namibia in the West German Anti-Apartheid Movement, see Kössler 2014a.

Northern Campaign in 1917, the bombing of the insurgent Bondelswarts in 1922 or the suppression of the Rehoboth Revolt in 1925, not to mention the oppression many Africans experienced on a daily basis under colonial rule. One may ask, therefore, whose peace Schneider-Waterberg has in mind. Quite likely he would say the peace of Namibians in general, since he consistently construes his own views to be those of 'Namibians'. Such a conflation between their own, minority perspective and that of 'Nambians' is also found among other German speakers (see ch. 6).

Critical issues about the (German) colonial past, and in particular the genocide, are then presented as imposed from outside. Again, the exclusion of black authors from Schneider-Waterberg's discussion is significant here, since acknowledging them would explode the idyllic picture of harmony which includes the alliance of German speakers with 'the Herero' in the context of the Turnhalle process and the DTA (2011: 20). While realignments that took place after 1990, in particular concerning the genocide, are indeed remarkable (cf. ch. 11), the argument that these issues of the colonial past could only be raised with any seriousness after independence had been achieved (Katjavivi 2010) needs to be considered, particularly when one raises issues of South African colonialism in Namibia.

DENIAL AND THE EXTREME RIGHT IN GERMANY AND BEYOND

The second line of denialist argument boils down to obliterating the past, at least where such a past is not palatable. Schneider-Waterberg links this to dissociating himself from 'German initiatives for festivals of the cult of guilt of 2004' and blames 're-education' in West Germany and 'dictatorship' in East Germany for 'delaying a German self-determination' (2011: 24, 23). In this way, those German authors whom he sees to be overwhelmed by 'unmastered German old baggage' (2011: 133), including the 'allocation of guilt for two World Wars', appear to be articulating a 'self-agonising self-image' when they, in Schneider-Waterberg's view, impose their problems on unsuspecting Namibians (2011: 8). Note here that important contributions to the debate come from authors such as Gerhard Pool, Isabel Hull and Jan-Bart Gewald, who are neither German nor Namibian. More importantly, such assertions resonate clearly with a distinctly German discourse: the clamour for a 'final stroke' to cease – or better yet, never to begin – confronting the heritage of the Holocaust. This demand has been voiced, in West Germany at least, throughout the entire existence of the Federal Republic, that is, for more than 60 years (Frei 2005, 1996). It is a hallmark of the right and extreme right in Germany. Seen from this perspective, Schneider-Waterberg's claims to a 'southern' perspective are questionable. He clearly plays to the tune provided by German denialists and advocates of a 'politics on the past'.⁴⁵

45 Especially referring to West Germany in the 1950s, the term *Vergangenheitspolitik* (politics referring to the past) has been coined specifically to denote a strategy of *avoiding* addressing Nazi crimes and of exempting the perpetrators of these crimes from punishment and ostracism (see Frei 1996).

In those quarters, concern is much less with repressing the memory of the 1904–08 genocide than with attacking the commemoration of the Holocaust. It is hard to overlook that by joining invectives against those who address the genocide in Namibia with rhetoric of the ‘final stroke’, denialists of both brands in fact join hands. In denying the genocide in Namibia in this way, inevitably a subtext emerges. In fact, the Holocaust is also belittled, if not repressed from public memory, and Schneider-Waterberg is explicit when he refers to the ‘guilt for two World Wars’. It is then consistent that he becomes enraged about research that out of concern with reconciliation addresses the issue of genocide (2011: 296, fn. 1). His idea of reconciliation seems not to focus so much on truth-seeking or listening to those who still experience trauma from the sufferings of their forebears, but favours an imposed silence, predicated on his brand of truth. However, he and his acolytes certainly do not have – or no longer have – the power to carry through with their aim.

Of course, it would be futile to go into this detail to such an extent if Schneider-Waterberg stood alone. On the contrary, telling connections can be found. Thus, his argument strikingly replicates that of the extreme rightist Claus Nordbruch.⁴⁶ Nordbruch assembles the entire range of arguments just rehearsed, including Colonel Trench’s edited testimony and the idea that Ovaherero who fled through the Omaheke simply vanished. For good measure, he tells heart-breaking stories about reported instances of the kindness of German soldiers.⁴⁷ These commonalities are suggestive of closer association or co-operation than Schneider-Waterberg or his AZ associates may be willing to acknowledge.⁴⁸ Still, Nordbruch has in fact not gone as far as Schneider-Waterberg did, especially in his later pieces, in posing as a champion of Ovaherero agency. Here, Nordbruch’s agenda seems to differ. He explicitly recognises the suffering of Ovaherero. In Nordbruch’s view, ‘the people’ had been left ‘to themselves’, to ‘all-encompassing suffering’, by their chiefs, who had planned their escape to Bechuanaland for a long time (2002: 111). This suffering is detailed at length (pp. 101–9) and attributed to a range of factors, such as an unusually dry rainy season from 1903–04 or the poison leaf also mentioned by Schneider-Waterberg, but pointedly not to the strategy of Trotha, whose infamous proclamation is relegated to psychological warfare (Nordbruch 2004: 94, 108–9; 2002: 113). Since Nordbruch’s text was published somewhat earlier than

46 On Nordbruch’s activities, see <http://ueberhauptgarnix.blogspot.de/2013/08/claus-nordbruch.html> (accessed 28.4.2015); http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claus_Nordbruch (accessed 28.4.2015). After November 2011, Nordbruch’s involvement with the Neo-Nazi terrorist group NSU (*Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund*) was discussed (SZ 27.11.2011; 9.12.2011). It emerged that he had relations with key groups from which this underground cell had formed. See http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claus_Nordbruch ‘Nach Chemnitz statt ans Kap’, *taz*. 6.5.2012. <http://www.taz.de/!92839/>; <http://2010sdafrica.wordpress.com/2012/09/13/exklusiv-nsu-fluchtversuch-nach-sudafrica/> (all accessed 27.11.2012). Nordbruch’s strategy of denial, even of the existence of a Nazi terrorist group, replicates his denial strategy in the case of the genocide in Namibia: foreground haphazard facts and disregard of obvious evidence, such as the video produced by the culprits themselves in which they extol their crimes.

47 For brevity’s sake, I refer to Nordbruch’s talk at the European American Culture Council, Sacramento, CA, 25.4.2004 as documented on https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/alt.revisionism/d-9_WoKWbTg (accessed 28.4.2015). For similar statements on a German rightist blog see <http://www.politikforen.net/showthread.php?14136-V%C3%B6lker-mord-an-den-Hereros/page10>; also <http://www.studentenbund-berlin.de/zeitung.htm> (all accessed 27.11.2012).

48 See also the observations on Nordbruch and the AZ in chapter 4.

Schneider-Waterberg's interventions, one may well surmise his influence on the latter. Still, Schneider-Waterberg seems to wield more direct influence on the conceptions that prevail among German speaking Namibians. Before we turn to this, a glance at German academia is in order.

WHAT'S IN A SOURCE? RESONANCE OF DENIALISM IN THE GERMAN ACADEMY

The approach of Schneider-Waterberg, and apparently also of Nordbruch, stand as examples of a more widespread discourse that has been taken up both in Namibia and in Germany (Kössler 2008a: 321–9). This approach resonates within explicitly academic endeavours and within the interested communities both in Namibia and Germany. After all, academic forays are unavoidably taken up in political quarters.

The academic strand has for some time been driven quite actively by Africanist Andreas Eckl, now based in Bochum. His work stands here as an important example. Eckl provoked heated debate and considerable irritation when he delivered a paper in the opening keynote panel of the central scholarly conference in Namibia, on the occasion of the centenary of the events of 1904. The title of the conference, 'Decontaminating the Namibian Past', implied a strong impulse to dispose of the burdensome past, once and for all (on which see Marx 2005: 156–7). Eckl's main thrust was directed against those 'professional historians' who advanced the 'genocide thesis' to serve their own career interests⁴⁹ – an assertion that attests to a singularly myopic idea about the workings of the still largely conservative German historical guild or of German academia more generally.

Apparently in accord with Lau and Schneider-Waterberg, Eckl repudiated ideas set forth by 'external' academics, and called for taking note of 'African' viewpoints as well as more down to earth sources. It emerged that the 'African' voices Eckl had in mind were mainly the 'settler historians' active in Namibia. Regarding sources, he later claimed that 'whole genres are ignored, particularly memoirs and other bibliographical material' (2008: 1). Eckl's main contribution to the debate, then, consists of an edited volume containing two diaries by German participants in the South West African campaign of 1904–05, one field medical doctor and Franz Xaver Epp⁵⁰, then a lieutenant, later to advance to Chief of the Nazi Colonial Office (Eckl 2005). Contrary to usual practice, Eckl does not provide an editorial report nor contextualises his sources. In particular, he does not explain what these sources may have to say on the genocide issue. It remains unclear how the field diaries could inform us about the strategy the commanding officers followed in Namibia and their intentions. These issues, that are decisive for any discussion of genocide, were in fact decided upon in Berlin (Hillebrecht 2007: 84–7).

⁴⁹ Eckl 2004; similar sentiments can be found in the internet forum quoted above.

⁵⁰ Styled Ritter von Epp later; see ch. 3.

Instead of clarifying issues about the rationale of his undertaking, Eckl devotes his introduction mainly to attacks on the use of sources by Jan Bart Gewald and Jürgen Zimmerer (cf. more extensively, Kössler 2005c, also Zeller 2006). This approach resonates with the above-mentioned preoccupation with the accumulation of sheer facts,⁵¹ or in this case, mustering *any* source. The serious methodological flaw consists in the lack of critical assessment that alone will constitute the worth of such sources: to establish what a source can tell us on the basis of the context of its constitution. This failure in scholarly procedure may be seen as indicative of the main preoccupation of the authors in question, to ‘disprove’ genocide, in terms of the logic of science, the deadly sin of *petitio principii*.

Contrary to Eckl’s implicit argument, it is important to clearly differentiate between the high command, the army and the individual soldier: ‘Genocide does not need human killing machines to be effective: willing or even reluctant compliance is enough’. For this reason, a central bogus argument collapses: ‘Nobody has ever pictured “German soldiers” as collective “plotters” of genocide’. The plotters are to be sought among the ‘military and civil command’ (Hillebrecht 2007: 76, 89). Eckl’s repudiation of ‘assumptions of a genocidally inclined German soldateska’ (2008: 50) is therefore beside the point. However, such reasoning also has to consider that ‘ordinary men’ have been shown to be available for the most abominable atrocities, on account of command, routine and camaraderie.⁵² Soldiers’ diaries, recording everyday events and feelings as well as frustration, and certainly considerable deprivation, even despondency, cannot tell us any more about strategic decision making than can the anguished testimonies by Ovaherero fleeing through the *sandveld*, testimonies which have been transmitted orally over decennia (Alnaes 1989) – or indeed the rabid diatribes in actual soldiers’ letters quoted in the German press at the time and stating for instance, ‘the Herero . . . must all be put down [*müssen alle dran glauben*]’ (as quoted in Sobich 2006: 108). Similar sentiments were reported by travelling Mission Inspector Spiecker, who in his diary quotes a young lieutenant who suggested one should ‘promise the Bondels everything . . . Once we’ve got them, we’ll hang them all’.⁵³

Regardless of its severe shortcomings as a scholarly work, Eckl’s publication was seized upon with eagerness from various quarters. Apparently, it was used by one of the grand old men of German colonial historiography, Horst Gründer, to disparage Jürgen Zimmerer’s work when the latter bemoaned that a prime time TV series on the German colonies, along with an accompanying book (Graichen & Gründer 2005), had ‘reintegrate(d) colonialism as a positively valued epoch of national history’ (Zimmerer 2005b). In his rejoinder, Gründer alluded to the supposedly dubious use of sources by Zimmerer, without giving details but most likely referring to Eckl. Moreover, Gründer also joined the apologetic crowd by claiming that Trotha’s proclamation had been revoked ‘when it became known in Berlin’,

51 The German quip of *Faktenhuberei* applies.

52 See lines of research on the Holocaust pursued for some time, cf. the paradigmatic study by Browning 1992 and more generally, on the banality of large scale violence, see Foster et al. 2005; such lines of thought also subvert any ‘collective guilt’ argument, see below.

53 Spiecker 2013: 382; diary entry for Lüderitzbucht, 3.9.1906; similarly, Siefkes 2013: 182.

without mentioning the internal debate and the actual endorsement of Trotha's intentions by Schlieffen (Gründer 2005).

Almost instantaneously, Gründer substantiated Zimmerer's charge, when on the occasion of a public debate in Berlin about the Maji Maji War, he was pressed on the issue of genocide, and went on record saying it was time to shed 'whininess, mawkishness and the penitential robe', since everywhere in history, modernisation had exacted social cost.⁵⁴ This strongly corroborated the impression that a major drive was underway for re-evaluating colonialism. Such a tendency clearly corresponds with the language of the 'final stroke' to end a critical engagement with state crimes of the past. Implicitly, Gründer linked up here with initiatives that were taken in France at the time to re-evaluate colonialism by highlighting its supposedly civilising effects.

Eckl's efforts were eagerly taken up by revisionist quarters in Namibia (cf. Schneider-Waterberg 2011: 11–2). This was in line with Eckl's own reasoning: 'Whoever speaks of a German genocide perpetrated by v. Trotha and the German *Schutztruppe*, commits a collective damnation which necessarily must provoke objection above all by the Namibia-Germans' (2005: 40). In this way, Eckl fell in line with the discourse on 'collective guilt'. The fictitious (Frei 2005: 145) claim is that such guilt was assigned to Germans at large in the wake of the Holocaust. For decades, this concept has been employed by revisionist circles to divert from the real problem, state sponsored mass crime of stupendous proportions. By pegging any guilt solely to 'Hitler and a small clique' (Frei 1996: 405; see also 23), not only the German nation, but also institutions such as the army or the judiciary are exonerated. Any idea about historical responsibility then vanishes into thin air. Yet such responsibility is implied by the claim which the German state pointedly insists upon, even up to the present, namely to be the legal successor of both the Wilhelminian and the Third *Reich*.⁵⁵ In any case, if Eckl and others object to being pictured as 'reactionaries waving the German Imperial flag' (Zollmann 2007: 124), they certainly have done little to forestall such an impression or to keep others (who actually adhere to these colours in their imperial or even in their Nazi version⁵⁶) from enlisting their support.

What amounts to an apologetic, denialist thrust is carried further by Zollmann (2007: 112–20), who conflates very diverse arguments. This concerns, among other things, the statement that genocide took place in Namibia in 1904–08, its connection, however mediated, to the Holocaust, and the idea of a 'causal chain' on a supposedly straight line from 'Windhoek to Auschwitz' (as critiqued by Kundrus 2004, 2005). The latter is in fact a bogus argument, since nobody has claimed such a straight causal connection (see ch. 3). In

54 As quoted in Kristen 2005; Wegmann 2005: 36; see also Kössler 2006, pp. 61–6.

55 Obviously, this also refers to a further dimension in the predicament of *Südwester*s defining themselves vis-à-vis (present-day) Germany.

56 The flag of Imperial Germany was black, white and red, and the same colours were used in the swastika flag. Black, white and red is in use at commemorative occasions of *Südwester*s in Namibia, while in Germany, it is only used by extreme rightists. In this way, they demonstrate their opposition to the tricolour of black, red and gold which historically is associated with German republicanism and democracy.

the hands of denialists, such conflation serves in the end to negate the genocide and at least in the subtext, the Holocaust along with it. This negation is certainly not the intention of the academics concerned, but rather a collateral effect. However, constantly railing against this purely fictitious 'equation' of the genocide in Namibia with the Holocaust (also Kundrus 2004), seems to gain an argumentative edge, which allows for further sloppy reading. For example, Zollmann blames the present author for 'stressing structural parallels between German colonialism and National Socialism' (Zollmann 2007: 111). However, the argument was for further research into discursive breaks occasioned by the broad publicity of the genocide in Germany in 1904–07 as a part of the rise of German radical nationalism (Kössler 2005a). A similar line of thought, predicated on the haphazard manner in which the Nazis arrived at their final solution, was suggested in one of the finest critiques of Lau's article (Dederling 1993: 83). Unwillingness or inability to see the differences in the arguments attests to a myopic fixation that no longer can be addressed in scholarly debate but rather has to be investigated as a social fact.

As a further back-up to his claim that the entire concern about genocide was a sort of foreign, 'eurocentric' imposition, Eckl asserted that this term was of 'no use whatsoever for Namibian historiography' (2005: 16). Rhetorically, he links up with the Africanist concern that was at the source of Brigitte Lau's intervention in 1989 and is also claimed by Schneider-Waterberg. At the time of the above mentioned 2004 conference, Eckl could have seen T-shirts on people in the streets of Windhoek, or cars adorned with posters, all referring to the genocide. 'Genocide' had become some kind of buzzword, even in troubling ways, such as the election of a 'Miss Genocide' in Okakarara (Förster 2010: 309–12). This, however, also attests to a tendency to incorporate such references into the collective identity of, at the least, large groups of Ovaherero. The mass turn-out at the memorial events in 2004, above all at the central event at Ohamakari on August 14, 2004, as well as subsequent developments, attest to this concern.⁵⁷

Similar commitment was obvious in the rousing speech the leading Ovaherero intellectual, Dr Zedekia Ngavirue, delivered at the Ohamakari occasion to a crowd persevering in the moonlight after a long and exciting day.⁵⁸ It would be hard to contest 'Dr Zed's' claim to being a Namibian historian, and in his work he has addressed both the interrelationship between fierce African resistance against colonialism and the 'reign of terror' particularly of Trotha (Ngavirue 1997: 121; see also 115–124). More Namibians have addressed the issue, for example, Peter Katjavivi in his account of the '1904–7 war of resistance' (1988: 8–11; also 1986: 43–6). There is no doubt that in Namibia as anywhere else – and among Namibians maybe more than among people of other nations – history is a contested terrain. It may be indicative of the ferocity of the contest when participants in a debate are prepared to recognise only a certain group of 'historians'. In this case, the disregard for the work of black Namibian historians may attest to the framing of Africans rather as objects of knowledge than as serious partners in truth seeking and dialogue.

⁵⁷ This also applies to the mass turnout at the return of human remains in October 2011, see ch. 12.

⁵⁸ Personal observation, Ohamakari, 14.8.2004.

Finally, it should be mentioned that revisionists are also sometimes prepared to learn. More recently, Eckl has retraced his steps and has explicitly acknowledged having learned from his critics. He no longer contests the issue of genocide, while maintaining his views on the sources (2008). This warrants serious respect on the level of personal attitudes. Still, the above observations on discursive strategies are not called into question by such otherwise important changes.

In his former work particularly Eckl assumes the position of a mouthpiece for German speaking Namibians.⁵⁹ This may lead to a better understanding about the concept of reconciliation which is repeatedly invoked in these quarters. In what may be considered a commentary to Schneider-Waterberg's more opaque pronouncements, Eckl calls on 'academic historiography' to 'create a precondition for reconciliation and mutual respect' rather than to deepen 'the rifts between the current posterity of the colonists and the colonised of yore'. Apparently such respect, in Eckl's view, has to address first and foremost the quest for 'the location of one's own self . . . which is constitutive for the historiography of German speaking Namibians'.

In this way, Eckl hopes for progress in 'overcoming (*Bewältigung*) the consequences of colonialism today and for the creation of "normal" relationships between the various population groups in contemporary Namibia' (2005: 41). Far from a quest for objectivity as clamoured for in other contexts, this aim apparently is served best, in Eckl's view, by leaving out facts that might appear too offensive to one of the groups involved. As any observer in Namibia or a reader of the Namibian press can see, however, such an approach clashes with those who see recognition of past suffering as a prerequisite to mutual respect and subsequent reconciliation. As mentioned above, the violent colonial past is present in people's minds, and reconciliation cannot be reached by decreed silence, least of all when such decrees emanate from the position of perpetrators.

DENIALISM IN ACTION

Quite apart from their questionable merits from a scholarly perspective, the writings that have been analysed here at some length have been effective in practical ways. They have influenced discourse in various quarters, and this has been shown in terms of the academic field in Germany. Nordbruch in particular has access to a wide network within right wing circles in Germany, and this is reflected in the relevant journals and websites. Relevant contexts reach from right wing and conservative student corporations in Germany through nostalgic circles organised around the memory of the lost eastern provinces, right to the traditionalist and nostalgic bodies concerned more directly with Germany's former

59 Again, there is a need to steer clear of essentialisation; however, in terms of public discourse, very little else is to be heard from German speaking Namibians, besides the denialist and revisionist arguments and diatribes (see below).

colonies.⁶⁰ Of course, the relevance of such activities rests to a considerable extent on their connectedness and cross references.

Within Namibia and well beyond, one of the hubs and venues for such interchanges and discussions is the *AZ*. As will be seen from the following few examples, taken from early 2012,⁶¹ this connection evolves in an interplay between editorial content and letters to the editor. While German speaking Namibians figure prominently in the letters, they are by no means the only contributors. When the letter writers mention their locations with their signatures, a small global community emerges, with input coming from North America, Paraguay or Indonesia, besides of course Namibia, Germany, Austria and also South Africa. In this way, the exchanges via the letters to the editor reflect the transcontinental entanglement that is actualised by debate on the genocide and generally about the colonial past.

The paper's busy interactive pages regularly are invigorated even more when the German colonial past is at stake. In late 2011 and early 2012, there were a number of events that were predestined to fire up letter writers. The repatriation of skulls from Germany to Namibia (see ch. 12) triggered much excitement and intense comment by readers, as did the rededication of the Rider Statue in November 2010, its centenary barely two months later, and then the removal of the Rider in late 2013 (see ch. 6). In early 2012, the sequence of events was punctuated by two prominent visits, by *Präsident* Nikolaus Schneider of the Rhenish Protestant Church, who served also as Council Chairperson of the German Protestant Church (EKD) and by Walter Lindner, at that time head of the Africa desk in the German Foreign Office. The almost unabated flow of letters and comments cannot be dealt with here in full, but a few highlights convey a sense of how the denialist arguments discussed above played out in a section of the public sphere. In the age of the internet, this sphere clearly bridges Namibia and Germany and even reaches well beyond the two countries.

Within the letters and comments, particularly fierce responses were provoked by a short letter that appeared in the *AZ* early in January, sent in by a Berlin secondary school form. The text was motivated by the treatment of German colonialism in their history class. The learners of *Walter Rathenau-Schule* vented their dismay and astonishment about what they perceived as clear pointers towards a connection between Nazism and issues connected with the Namibian genocide, including 'the "race science" and the concentration camps'. The students also remarked on the colonial monuments in Namibia and felt they should be labelled appropriately to commemorate the 'far higher losses of Herero and Nama', compared to losses of Germans.⁶²

This letter triggered an avalanche of letters to the editors. Most writers sternly repudiated the views articulated by the learners. The teacher was blamed for not having instructed her students properly, and the students were lectured about what they ought to read to get the proper understanding of things. Unsurprisingly, recommendations included books by Schneider-Waterberg and Nordbruch, and the right wing web page of the 'Hilfskomitee

60 <http://www.deutsche-schutzgebiete.de/deutsche-kolonien.htm> (accessed 2.12.2012); Leesen 2004.

61 See also the close of chapter 6 on the response to the removal of the Rider Statue in late 2013.

62 'Taten erinnern an NS-Zeit', *AZ* 12.1.2012.

Südliches Afrika'.⁶³ Arguments set forward by Schneider-Waterberg and Nordbruch were marshalled, such as the idea that Ovaherero had retreated through the Omaheke through their own decision, or that Ovaherero leaders followed a premeditated plan to go to Bechuanaland, leaving their followers to their own devices. These considerations were peppered with paternalistic appeals to the learners and sterner admonishments to their teachers to do their homework. There were references to the supposed crisis of the German educational system which the letter writers linked to the supposedly low standard of instruction.

Once again, the well-worn trope was invoked of 'soiling one's own (German) nest' by addressing crimes committed within the purview of the German state. This saying was linked to the furore about a current book on the supposed decay of Germany. Apparently, letter writers thought the learners and their teacher had also contributed to Germany's downfall,⁶⁴ and ostensibly, this was done by joining 'the current German cult of guilt'.⁶⁵ Another letter writer invoked ownership of a national history and blamed the students for their 'colonial' attitude when they called for changes in colonial monuments, 'by which our natives have not been bothered for 100 years'.⁶⁶

Letter writers who were already engaged in what can well be called a 'shit storm' were fired up once again when during his visit later in January, *Präses* Schneider preached a sermon in Katutura. On this occasion, Schneider honoured the memory 'of persons of the Herero people, but also Nama and Damara, who were robbed by German troops of their land, were fought against and annihilated'. Schneider also noted the ambivalent role of missionaries during colonial times and of the German Protestant Church in relation to Apartheid.⁶⁷ This time, the *AZ* editors took the lead with an angry comment which blamed Schneider for using clichés and lies since he had failed to mention Germans killed by Ovaherero in the early stages of the war. The comment repudiated 'legend, demonising and exaggeration' and called for a peaceful future, obviously on the basis of a 'final stroke' and silence about the past (Hofmann 2012a).

Schneider responded in a brief statement which critiqued the commentator's tendency to 'relativise' crimes such as genocide and his failure to contribute towards understanding between the communities concerned (*AZ* 25.1.2012). The following flood of letters to the editor accused Schneider of, among other things, 'false testimony', and insinuated that he was an 'agitator of communism'. Schneider's intervention was likened to the supposed

63 Letters by Ernst Hashagen, *AZ* 16.1.2012, Heiko Thesen, *AZ* 20.1.2012; on the Support Committee Southern Africa, see <http://www.hilfskomitee-suedliches-afrika.de/index.html> (accessed 11.12.2012), which recycles Schneider-Waterberg's and Nordbruch's basic argument.

64 Letters by Horst Gonschorek, *AZ* 16.1.2012 (reference to Thilo Sarrazin, *Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*, München: DVA 2010); Horst Herr, *AZ*, 17.1.2012; J. Hofmann *AZ*, 18.1.2012; Hartmut Prause, *AZ* 20.1.2012; Heidi Höpfner *AZ* 28.8.2013 ('kulturlöse Nestbeschmutzer'; 'soilers of their own nest, completely lacking culture').

65 Letter by Hans Hilpisch *AZ*, 12.1.2012.

66 Letter by J. Hoffmann, 18.1.2012; cf. letter by Rembert Moenikes, 17.1.2012.

67 Quoted in a press statement by the Rhenish Protestant Church, Düsseldorf/Windhoek, 21.1.2012, *epd-Dokumentation* 8–9/2012, p. 87; see also Fischer 2012b.

misdeeds of delegated pastors from Germany who had used the Sermon on the Mount, 'to stamp us here into the muck' – referring to controversies about the widespread advocacy of Apartheid among German speaking congregations before independence.⁶⁸

Another letter took Schneider's admission of guilt for his church as a cue to once again rail against 'collective guilt' and an 'insanity induced by re-education',⁶⁹ which of course referred to the debates and practices in (West) Germany about how to grapple with the heritage of Nazism. Schneider was taken to task for 'a lousy attempt at ingratiation to "endear" himself with the ethnic groupings of Nama, Herero etc.'⁷⁰

The letter writing continued well into February 2012, and prompted responses from local church authorities: First, Pastor Tietz, ministering to German Protestant congregations at the Namibian coast, stressed in a pastoral letter the 'unconditional limit' to the freedom of opinion 'where the life, suffering and dying of affected humans is dishonoured, ignored, played down or even abused'.⁷¹

A few days later, Bishop Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) voiced his deep concern about what was going on in the *AZ*. Speaking for his church and thus for many of those whose forebears were survivors of the genocide, Kameeta bemoaned a lack of respect and sensitivity. He further accused the *AZ*, that by opening their pages to these views, they were enhancing division and were working against national reconciliation. Kameeta also commended the reconciliatory contribution of *Präses* Schneider. This statement was documented in *AZ* and reported in other Namibian media.⁷² In his op-ed, *AZ* Deputy Editor-in-Chief Eberhard Hofmann tried to straddle respect for Kameeta's spiritual and public authority with a scathing indictment that both Kameeta and Schneider had relied on 'selected oral tradition and self-censored writings' instead of 'serious sources' (Hofmann 2012b). From Hofmann's enthusiastic review of Schneider-Waterberg (Hofmann 2012a), one may surmise what kind of 'sources' he had in mind.

Again, some letter writers chimed in and lectured the bishop, as they had previously the *Präses*, on how he should make up for his supposedly insufficient knowledge.⁷³ Once again, the accusations of lying and falsification were raised and the entire issue of genocide referred to as propaganda by the British and the GDR.⁷⁴ These letter writers clearly took up arguments provided by Schneider-Waterberg and also by Nordbruch; the series of letters,

68 Letter by Eckhard Leinberger, *AZ* 8.2.2012; cf. letter by Alfred Paul, *AZ* 3.2.2012.

69 Letter by Karl Rudolf Sievers, *AZ* 8.2.2012; 're-education' refers to efforts by the Allies shortly after World War II to change the mind frames of Germans who had in their majority been loyal followers of Hitler.

70 Letter by Alfred Paul, *AZ* 24.1.2012.

71 Letter by Pastor Klaus-Peter Tietz, Swakopmund, 22.2.2012 (copy in author's possession): see *AZ*, 8.2.2012; for similar sentiments, see the pastoral letter by Bishop Erich Hertel of 3.3.2012 (copy in author's possession).

72 Kameeta 2012; see *TN* 5.3.2012; *NE* 5.3.2012.

73 Letter by Agnes Hoffmann, *AZ* 7.3.2012; cf. letter by Hartmut Bartmuß, *AZ* 9.2.2012.

74 Letters by Alfred Paul and Hans-Werner Thesen, *AZ* 7.3.2012

then, can be considered as pointing towards a kind of epistemic community that is prepared and willing to put this repertoire of argument to active and public use.

Once the editors had announced that they would forthwith be more restrictive about the 'doubling' of statements (AZ 7.3.2012), there was a shift towards editorial statements. By and large, such comments reiterated what had been said before in readers' letters, charted by Schneider-Waterberg and others. When at the end of March, the German Parliament threw out two motions relating to the genocide (cf. ch. 12), AZ Editor-in-Chief Stefan Fischer (2012c) singled out the Social Democrats, who had supported one of the defeated motions. In Fischer's view, such support was 'simple-minded'. Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul had re-stated her opinion that what happened in Namibia in 1904 should be considered genocide,⁷⁵ even though the relevant UN convention was adopted only in 1948. To Fischer, this very commonplace operation of conceptualising an historical event on the basis of later insight appeared 'confusing' and not really 'credible'. Furthermore, Fischer attacked the civil society coalition that had supported in particular the motion of the Left Party, which had been defeated in the same session of the *Bundestag*, because they represented a rather wide range of groups with various focal concerns. Here, once again, recourse to the claim of lack of information was used – only 'well-founded' arguments would be acceptable, and one may surmise what these are meant to be. The caption of this op-ed promised to unmask 'Pretensions on incorrect facts' (Fischer 2012c).

In this way, the campaign continued more or less unabated, shifting its thematic focus with the run of the daily news. It cannot be followed here in further detail. What should have become clear is the resonance denialist writers find in the quarters reached by the AZ, as well as some colonial traditionalist and rightist websites and blogs. These reach well beyond Namibia and hook up with right-wing politics, in particular among German speakers around the world. The frame of mind that is articulated in this context came to the fore with particular clarity when the Left Party *Bundestag* Deputy, Niema Movassat, visited Namibia in August 2012. Once again, this visit called forth copious letters in the AZ. Significantly, Movassat's concern for Namibia was met with 'surprise' since in the view of some, as a son of parents hailing from Iran, he should rather deal with problems in that country.⁷⁶ Such reasoning correlates with ethnicist (*völkisch*) frames of reference, besides the pervasive tendency to mobilise each and every far-fetched circumstance in support of the denialist stance. It also underscores the clear discursive continuities that exist between denialism regarding the genocide in Namibia and more generally, right wing as well as extreme right-wing positions, particularly in Germany.

75 For her original statement at the Ohamakari commemoration on 14.8.2004, see ch. 11.

76 Letter by Margit Wilfinger, AZ, 6.9.2012; see also letter by S.K. Mahmoudi, AZ, 7.9.2012.

6

The Windhoek Rider: Contested Terrain, Multiple Meanings¹

WHETHER AS THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE LOGO OF THE SOUTH WEST BREWERIES, AS A prevalent bumper sticker, or an almost ubiquitous motif on picture postcards, the Windhoek Rider (*Reiterdenkmal*, aka Equestrian statue) has been a symbol of central importance for the German presence in the south-west of Africa since its erection in 1912. This fact emerged clearly from responses when the memorial was demolished in late 2013. The German presence in Namibia has undergone far-reaching shifts in its social and political meaning. The same applies to ideas about what ‘German’ might mean or imply in the region (see ch. 4). Above all, the Rider Statue is a focus of memory politics and persistent issues and controversies within Namibia, and between Namibians and Germans. The comment of an uninitiated yet perceptive Angolan visitor is indicative of the statue’s meaning: ‘This is a discourse’ – clearly of power and claim to domination. This chapter traces the Rider’s history and the recent controversy surrounding its removal to complete the background of current memory politics.

THE RIDER AS THE CENTRE OF WINDHOEK’S COLONIAL CITY CROWN

The city centre of Windhoek still bears the clear imprint of German colonial times, as described in chapter 1. Even a quarter century into independence and after the demolition of the monument, huge brown signposts still point the way from the Central Business District to the tourist attractions, ‘*Christuskirche*’, ‘*Alte Feste*’ and ‘*Reiterdenkmal*’ (see ch. 1, Fig. 1.1

1 For an earlier version of this chapter, see Kössler 2013a; it has been adapted and updated here.

on page 27). Unmistakably, the German wording underlines the colonial background. The ensemble meanwhile has been broken up, since the monumental Independence Memorial Museum has been erected on the small slope that leads from the *Christuskirche* up to the colonial citadel, *Alte Feste*. The museum was placed on the grounds occupied up to 2009 by the renowned Rider statue, which was removed to clear the space for the new structure, and erected again in 2010 some 150 m south, beside the entrance to the *Alte Feste*.

For some decades, this former citadel has housed the National Museum. On Christmas Day 2013, the Rider memorial was demolished, and the bronze statue was placed within the courtyard of the *Alte Feste*. These various steps reveal probing and vacillation on the part of the Namibian authorities who made these changes to the entrance of the central government district a long time after independence. In terms of the Windhoek memory landscape, there is little doubt that at its old spot, the Rider occupied the centre within a triptych of colonial architecture. For such reasons, the statue's fate and trajectory are of considerable importance for Namibian memory politics, more specifically for its various 'German' dimensions.

The Rider has been the only significant and salient memorial monument in central Windhoek. Countless travel guides list it as one of the main tourist attractions. In its old spot, and also after the move in 2009–2010, it was visited regularly by tourists, many of whom were from Germany, taking a brief tour of the capital before continuing on to Swakopmund at the coast and Etosha Game Park. Even though the original colonial architectural ensemble in Windhoek has been broken up by the strong statement of the Independence Memorial Museum, this has not seriously or effectively impinged on the singularity of the Rider. Its special position is easily borne out by a brief look at other memorial monuments in the city centre (see ch. 1; Melber 2015a: 142–55). The construction of Heroes' Acre, bordering the southern suburbs did not change this in any way. The shift of the Rider from its original site to the front of the *Alte Feste* had little effect on its meaning and importance within the memory landscape of the Namibian capital. It remains to be seen whether the later demolition and further removal will have different consequences. These considerations must remain speculative at this point, but without a doubt, the Rider refers to a number of further contexts that cannot be gauged from its physical form and situation alone. These aspects, which are relevant to the theme of this book, will be explored below.

ORIGINS AND THE STATEMENT OF THE MEMORIAL

The Rider is a monument of victory. It was intended to document and symbolically underline Germany's claim to permanently dominate and rule her colony, then referred to as German South West Africa. This claim was brought out by Governor Theodor Seitz at the dedication ceremony on January 27, 1912 in unmistakable words: 'The brazen rider of the *Schutztruppe*, on the look-out from this place over the land, proclaims to the world that we are the masters



Fig. 6.1 Inauguration of the Rider Statue, 1912. Photograph: National Archives of Namibia, photo. no. 28649.

here and shall remain so' (as quoted in Zeller 2000: 120). The Governor articulated the general intention of colonial monuments, which has been aptly summarised: 'Through monuments, colonial rulers occupied African space also in symbolic ways, and at the same time, they subjugated African history, they subordinated it to the forms of commemoration and of memory politics prevalent in Europe' (Speitkamp 2000: 166).

The claim for uncontested control and domination might not have appeared quite as evident and unshakable to contemporaries as the Governor's words outwardly conveyed. After all, the Namibian War had ended only four years before. In 1904, both Ovaherero and Nama had, at least during various brief stages, seriously called into question colonial rule. At some conjunctures at least, they had managed to drive the colonial power to the verge of defeat. As we have seen, the war also had serious repercussions in metropolitan Germany (see chs 2 and 3). The martial gesture of the Rider itself, as well as the inscription on the bronze plaque on its base, still recall a sense of existential danger, by making reference to 'salvaging and safeguarding this country during the Herero and Hottentot Rising 1903–1907 and during the Kalahari expedition 1908'. Implicitly, this wording also refers to the genocide by which African resistance in central and southern Namibia had been broken in the course of the war.

The Rider was erected at a time of apparent consolidation of colonial rule, both on account of the brutal and ruthless elimination of any African challenge, and of the diamond finds that decisively bolstered the colonial exchequer. The erection of a victory monument was therefore to be expected. Nevertheless, the sense of danger and insecurity that was still present in some minds is revealed in some of the memory literature that reflects a sense of horror and bereavement, particularly in the cases of farmers who were attacked, and in a number of cases also killed, mainly during the early stages of the Ovaherero–German and of the Nama–German War. The early stages of these wars were marked by African military successes.² Even in later years, settlers regularly articulated their persistent fear of another African ‘rising’. The end of the war, therefore, hardly spawned feelings only of triumph. One may surmise that sentiments of fear and disdain were present as well. Precisely these attitudes leave no space for earlier conceptions about the ‘noble savage’.³

Ambivalence between a prevalent discourse of domination and control and a subtext of uncertainty and insecurity may be gauged even from the process through which the design of the statue was determined before its production in Germany, its transport to Namibia and its eventual erection in Windhoek. Following the decision to erect a memorial, a competition for projects was organised. As a matter of course, this competition amongst sculptural artists took place in metropolitan Germany. In the process, a number of alternatives were eliminated and the original design of the executed version was changed considerably. The whole decision-making process was predicated on the idea of erecting a victory monument. This was even carried as far as systematically eliminating from the design any traits that might distract from this overriding message. Thus, any designs depicting sorrow about the dead or predicaments of war were expunged. Even the idea of representing a subjugated African to visualise those vanquished in the war was abandoned. In this way, a clear gesture conveying a claim to domination prevailed, in the interests, at the same time, of a strong statement of ‘continuous preparedness for defence and war’.⁴

In this way, the Rider brought out with particular force the claim to colonial domination, corresponding with the neighbouring buildings. Remember that the *Christuskirche* was intended both as a religious building and as a statement of imperial claims to world power status. Thus, the church was not only physically close to the Rider but also needs to be seen symbolically as closely interlinked with that monument in conveying a decisive message of power and dominance. Obviously the *Alte Feste*, even after its practical military function had terminated, could only add to this clear message conveyed by the ensemble – one of military prowess and insistent claim to domination.

2 A typical and fairly widely read publication is Eckenbrecher 1907; on early Ovaherero successes, see Ngavirue n.d.

3 The ambivalent ethnographic registers have been addressed by Steinmetz 2007: ch.3; for related missionary views centred on Hendrik Witbooi, see Menzel 2000; Reeh 2000.

4 Zeller 2000: 114–9, as quoted on p. 118; on account of this source based evidence, Speitkamp’s interpretation that the Rider honours ‘concretely the way of living and fighting in the colony’ (2000: 172) seems dubious, although it may speak to current concerns among the *Südwester* community.

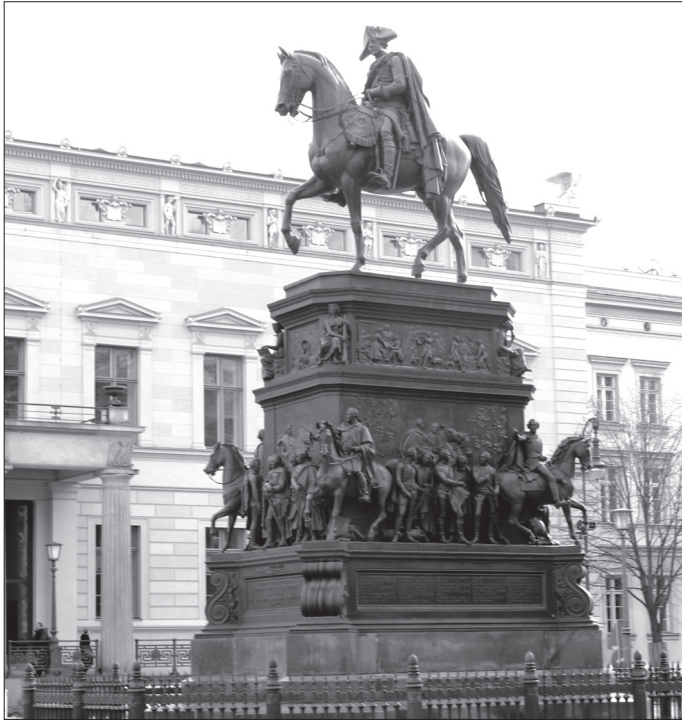


Fig 6.2 Different riders in Germany: above, Frederic II of Prussia by Knobelsdorff in Berlin; left, the Golden Rider (August I of Saxony) in Dresden. Photographs: Reinhart Kössler.

When compared to rider statues one can view in Germany, the Windhoek Rider does little to evoke, say, the magnificent dynamism of the Golden Rider in Dresden or the dignity of Knobelsdorff's famous statue of Frederic II, which today is stationed in front of Humboldt University in the boulevard of *Unter den Linden* in Berlin. The horse in Windhoek is stiff and static, its two front legs dug parallel into the ground. It is hard to understand how enthusiasts can see here a 'high level of artistic and creative achievement' (Vogt 2012). However, once understood as a symbol of an implanted power that meant to stay, even this somewhat ungainly attitude may make sense. The horseman's upright stature, with the erect rifle to his side and the gaze ranging afar over the valley below and also towards the North, clearly underscored claims to domination and control. As far as this gaze went 'into the direction of the German Empire' (as quoted in Vogt 2012), the inherent connection with the colonial metropole was further reinforced.

From a different perspective, the Rider itself digresses from the symbolic code prevailing at the time in Western Europe, where besides mythological figures, representation on horseback was reserved for reigning sovereigns (which in Germany would have included 26 monarchs, who in formal terms were federated and made up the German Empire, with the King of Prussia as Emperor). In contradistinction to this rule, the Windhoek Rider represents a commoner, an anonymous 'Rider', as the *Schutztruppe* soldiers were called (Speitkamp 2000: 172). Contrary to a common perception, the soldier does not represent General von Trotha. However, as the monument conveys a general attitude of triumph over the vanquished Africans, this interpretation shows that the memorial was understood in precisely the way it was intended.

Finally, the grounds on which both the church and the memorial were built carry a particular meaning and importance, since previously they had been occupied by the concentration camp, immediately adjacent to the *Alte Feste*. Contemporary images, which include picture postcards (see ch. 1, Fig. 1.2) illustrate this. The memorial ensemble, designed to display victory and a permanent claim to domination, was completed by the bronze tablets, carrying the names of the German soldiers who had died in Namibia, on the southern wall inside the *Christuskirche* (see ch. 1). In this way, the close and intimate connection that exists between the Rider, the *Christuskirche*, war and genocide was powerfully asserted by all these elements, meanings and interconnections.

AMBIVALENCE IN THE RIDER'S MEANINGS

During the decades of South African colonial rule after 1915, the Rider Statue served as one of the focal points of the emerging identity of Southwesterners (Zeller 2000: 243–9). As we shall see, this meaning was corroborated by the response to the removal of the statue on Christmas day 2013. After independence, the entire assemblage of colonial buildings in the Windhoek city crown was left untouched for nearly 20 years. However, the long-standing nexus between the Rider and identity constructions by German speakers was articulated

with particular clarity once plans became known to erect the Independence Memorial Museum at the original place of the Rider. At that time, the Rider became a veritable rallying point of identity statements by relevant groups of German speakers. A particularly evocative example is provided by a commentator in *AZ* shortly before the Rider was lifted from its pedestal. This commentator raged about the 'rape of the past' that he saw effected by any changes to the colonial ensemble. He quoted the Chairman of the German Cultural Council (*Deutscher Kulturrat*), Eckhart Mueller, who had gone on record with his own understanding of history: 'Each nation ought to respect and honour the accomplishments of past, present and future. Only then shall we be a grown-up nation'. The commentator added his chagrin about 'the backward and childlike government' which supposedly wreaked havoc with a colonial heritage which apparently by its age and existence had acquired the status of sanctity (*AZ*, 14. 9.2009).

This discourse speaks to central motives that are pervasive in the *AZ*: The 'past' or 'history' is equated with an image of history which is supposedly predominant amongst the addressees, German speaking Namibians. Again, this comparatively tiny group is conflated with the idea of Namibians at large. Such an image of history thrives on the projections about civilising pioneers and their achievements. For this perspective the Rider, and more generally colonial monuments and buildings, are claimed as symbolic underpinnings. By the same token, colonial violence and injustice, as well as current gross inequalities (see ch. 1), in large part still due to the heritage of colonialism, are obliterated. The achievements claimed for the colonisers are invoked to justify their deeds and to blot out remembrance of their crimes. This discursive strategy also immunises the conscience against the present situation, including the stark differences in living conditions that continue to privilege German speakers.

In independent Namibia, such deeply colonial modes of thinking are proving unsustainable. The relocation of the Rider therefore appeared as tangible proof of a change in power relations, at least as far as symbolic politics go. When a date had actually been set and the day of the removal approached in earnest, verbal protest was voiced even more emphatically. A lengthy memorandum (Vogt 2008) delved into the ostensible spiritual meanings of the Rider. This argument strived to re-interpret the monument as a place where the dead can be honoured. At the same time, the symbolic content of the statue as a victory monument was strenuously denied – against clear documentary evidence. In ways that remained somewhat opaque, these considerations were linked to a concern with reconciliation between the various groups of descendants of those who had been involved in the Namibian War; hereby, the positions of victims and perpetrators were conveniently levelled. Moreover, Vogt's 'memorandum' glossed over the message in the inscription on the Rider, which mentions solely Germans who died in the war. On the other hand, the memorandum linked the supposedly 'sacrosanct' nature of the statue, again in some hazy way, to the physical dangers it would face when removed from its pedestal and relocated. Counterarguments pointed to the aggressive form in which the monument asserts colonial and specifically German domination of the country (Kaapama 2008).

During the mid-1990s, a group of German speaking Namibians had attempted to supplement the Rider's message by a tablet which was supposed to be hoisted on a stone and erected next to it. This tablet was meant to convey an attitude of mourning directed towards all the war victims during Namibia's period of colonial rule. In this way, it would have contradicted the exclusive message on the bronze plaque at the Rider's base. In the end, the initiative came to nought, apparently due to the successful delaying tactics of the then National Monuments Council⁵. Such a comment would have softened somewhat the triumphant attitude of the victory monument. The intended text would have evened out the important difference between victims and perpetrators. In this way, the additional tablet would have conveyed a message similar to the one which the memorandum (Vogt 2008) subsequently claimed that the Rider had carried all along. At the time, the initiators of the tablet felt they should countenance equating victims and perpetrators, colonised and colonisers in the text, in order to reach out to a larger group of German speakers.⁶ However, the important point is that this group felt an urgent need to comment on the original monument at least in this fashion, regardless of the misgivings some of the group's members may have felt. The 'Rider Initiative' adopted a view of the statue as a 'German' responsibility, even though the intended tablet was to speak to overarching Namibian concerns. Later, German speakers tended to equate the Rider with 'Namibian' history and thus conflated their sectional views and concerns with national ones.

In 2009, the relocation of the statue was undertaken in a painstaking process which involved lifting it from its base and packing it into a container. The Rider was then stored for several months. The pedestal was also disassembled with great care, all the individual rocks of its base being documented and numbered to ease rebuilding at the new site. This costly operation was financed by private donations mainly from the German speaking community. This circumstance once again underlines that community's enormously privileged economic position in Namibia, which was mobilised in this case to carry out an action of central importance for the memory politics of a sizeable and influential section of German speakers. Readiness to contribute towards this effort also attested to this section's strong commitment to the statue and to a high degree of internal networking and communication. Finally, the Rider was relocated in front of the *Alte Feste* and rededicated on November 14, 2010 on the occasion of the German day of remembrance for fallen soldiers (*Volkstrauertag*).

Black Namibians have related to the Rider in their own varied and distinctive ways, implying re-appropriations of the Rider by victim groups.⁷ Such re-appropriation implied a redefinition of the monument's meaning, at least for short moments at diverse times. At a turning point in Namibian history, in the days after the shooting in the Old Location and the struggle against the removal of people to Katutura on December 10, 1959, one morning

5 Zeller 2000: 253–9; most recently, Henning Melber (2015a: 21) has disclosed that the prime mover within the National Monuments Council who prevented the plans of the Rider Initiative from being adopted was 'a strategically placed official of German background who showed explicit leanings towards a colonial apologetic perspective of reactionary German-ness'. This official was Andreas Vogt (Melber 2015b: 327f).

6 Informal talks at the time, with Henning Melber, one of the main movers of the initiative.

7 The broadly similar account of Elago 2015: 284–5 adds detail to the following observations.



Fig. 6.3 Removal of the Reiterdenkmal in 2009, each individual rock of the plinth numbered to ensure accurate re-building around the Rider at its new site. Photograph: Nicola Brandt.

the Rider's head was covered by a sack. The flowers planted in front of the monument had been picked and placed at the pit of the Rider's gun and the horse's bit, as well as on the sack itself. As Clemens Kapuu explained at the time, the sack was supposed to prevent the Rider from seeing the misery that prevailed in the Old Location (Zeller 2000: 244–5).

A different perspective reveals another explanation, one not acknowledged in public discourse let alone in official pronouncements. This perspective squarely emanates from a victim position. Ovaherero stress that at its original site, the Rider marked the place of the former concentration camp, where their forebears had suffered and perished. According to testimony, this knowledge was transmitted by fathers who led their sons to the front of the monument and instructed them accordingly.⁸ It is obvious, however, that this marking of the place is not tied to the Rider as such, but conceivably could be also – or better and more explicitly – accommodated within the framework of the Independence Memorial Museum.

The connection between the former site of the Rider (now of the museum) and the former concentration camp was brought out in an impressive fashion by an unofficial

⁸ Luther Zaire, personal communication, Bochum, 17.3.2004; 21.6.2004.



Fig. 6.4 A field of white crosses around the Rider, symbolising people or places connected with the genocide and resistance. Photograph: Namibia Media Holdings Archive.

initiative a year before the impending relocation kindled the debate in earnest. Overnight, a whole field of wooden crosses painted in white were planted around the Rider, each bearing the name of a central place of the genocide (AZ 10.7. 2008). Nor did this exhaust the imagination that drove spontaneous and unofficial comment. A few weeks after the crosses had appeared, a small Namibian flag was placed near the top of the Rider's gun. In a simple, but impressive fashion, this feature – small in itself – ironically belied the colonial claim of permanent domination which still emanated from the statue, its gesture and its plaque (AZ 24.10.2008).

A more elaborate ironic comment came from Namibian film maker Tim Hübschle (2009). His brief semi-documentary 'The Rider without a Horse' takes the cue for its title from the Oshiwambo name for Windhoek, 'The town of a man who never gets off his horse' (*Koshilando shoka kambe komusamane kalondoloka*). The film shows the Rider coming to life and stepping down into present day Windhoek, amazed and confused. In a particularly evocative scene, the Rider joins a Ovaherero *oturupa* which just 'happens' to march past City Hall, where the Rider paid his respects to the statue of Curt von François, still referred to as the 'Founder of Windhoek'. In the end, the Rider is escorted back onto his horse by two black drag queens. After the release of its first version, the film was supplemented by cumulative takes on the relocation process (Hübschle 2009).



Fig. 6.5 Mural painted on the side of the Theatre School, of the Rider exploding to leave a peaceful white rabbit. Photograph: Jill Kinahan.

International cooperation by Namibian artist Natasha Beukes and German painter Klaus Klinger within the framework of the more encompassing project 'Mural Global' has spawned a fresco which playfully envisages a completely different possibility: In this mural, various disarticulated parts of the Rider fly wildly through the blue Namibian sky, and on the Rider's pedestal remains only an unmistakably peaceful, snow white rabbit.⁹ It may not be an accident that this mural was painted on the side of the Theatre School that faces away from the former site of the Rider, a few hundred metres south on Robert Mugabe Avenue. In this way, it probably is noticed only by those who are expressly looking for it. It may be seen as part of *Südwester* discourse that this mural, in a contribution to AZ, was likened to 'almost murder', even though the commentator noted the rabbit's peaceful attitude. It seems that this discourse leaves little space for irony. Yet Beukes also gave the decisive clue when she stated that the mural had been prompted by the apperception 'that there is still a deep chasm between black and white, that many things have not yet changed' (AZ, 24.8.2001).

⁹ See the artists' brief statement on <http://www.farbfieber.de/UNIQ142515736417856/doc187A.html> (accessed 18.2.2015).



Fig. 6.6 Building of the Independence Memorial Museum, on the former site of the Rider statue (*Reiterdenkmal*). Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

POSTCOLONIAL ENTANGLEMENT

The initiatives just mentioned, which comment, somewhat ironically, on the Rider Statue, also attest to its persistent importance within the memory landscape of Namibia and Windhoek in particular – at least up to its abrupt removal from visual prominence in late 2013. The statue's importance became particularly evident in connection with the relocation of the monument. As has been noted, this was an elaborate process under the auspices of the German Cultural Council (*Deutscher Kulturrat*). The rededication ceremony as well as the Hundredth Anniversary of the Rider a little over a year later laid open once again the connections that exist between traditionalist and revisionist circles, among German speaking Namibians on the one hand and similarly minded circles in Germany on the other (see ch. 5).

The Rider had already been placed on its new site in front of the *Alte Feste* in February, but the initiators chose the highly evocative *Volkstrauertag*¹⁰ in late November for the formal rededication ceremony. Besides various representatives of German speaking Namibians,

¹⁰ Literally, 'People's Mourning Day', roughly comparable to Remembrance Day in Britain or Memorial Day in the U.S.A.

Ulla Schröder, First Chairperson of TSÜ, the society that even by its name memorialises the colonial *Schutztruppe*, had arrived from Germany. The speeches harped on the trope of 'reconciliation' and thus made use of a pervasive, though ill-defined feature of Namibian public discourse. Obviously, this was given a particular twist here. The speakers thought that 'reconciliation' should in the first place imply redress for what they felt was amiss in terms of respect for their own culture, language and identity as German speaking Namibians – or indeed, 'Germans' in Namibia. Far from addressing the gruesome heritage of the Namibian War, they considered the relocation of the Rider to be 'stifling' reconciliation because it supposedly violated their own feelings. Furthermore, speakers lashed out against the 'irresponsibility' of the Namibian Government which had left it to German speakers to get the Rider to its new site in safety. Still, speakers felt that now German colonial achievement would be underscored even more clearly with the new ensemble made up by the Rider and the *Alte Feste*.¹¹

Some fourteen months later, the Hundredth Anniversary of the Rider occasioned more aggressive speeches and actions. Possibly this was also due to the stormy exchange of opinion occasioned by the repatriation of human skulls from Germany to Namibia a few months before, and shortly after by the clear words of the Council Chairman (*Präses*) of the Evangelical German Protestant Church, Nikolaus Schneider, during his visit to Namibia.¹² The centenary of the Rider statue was celebrated on January 27, 2012. Again, Ulla Schröder was present and bemoaned a 'sad cusp for our culture', given the lack of respect for dead soldiers. In a symbolic gesture, as if to clarify her meaning, 'the first stanza of Germany's Song issued from her,' as AZ reported. This refers to the set practice that the current German national anthem comprises the third stanza of a 19th Century patriotic song while the first, in use during the Weimar Republic and to some extent also during the Nazi era, is today ostracised. Today's official text refers to the need for and benefit of national unity, justice and freedom, whereas the first stanza which Schröder had intoned extols German superiority, starting with the evocative words: 'Germany, Germany, conquering everything . . .'. Understandably, the text is strictly kept out of official use in Germany today, and its use is considered to be indicative of rightist, ultra-nationalist sentiment.

At the centenary, Harald Koch, Chairperson of the Committee for Care of War Graves (*Kriegsgräberfürsorge*), also found strong words: 'It is time now, 22 years after independence, that the German speaking community in Namibia take their legitimate place within society. This community should be a hammer for its own destiny and not an anvil.' (AZ, 31.1.2013) Koch also referred to a 'double genocide' which supposedly had happened in 1904, since German settlers had lost their lives as well. Against the historical record, he ascribed to Samuel Maharero an order to 'kill all the Germans'.¹³ Previously, the events of the Namibian

11 AZ, 15.11.2010; 1.11.2010; 2.11.2010; 3.11.2010; 23.11.010; 3.12.2010.

12 See ch. 5 and Kössler & Melber 2012.

13 AZ, 3.2.2013; historians agree that generally, women and children were spared by Ovaherero warriors (Hull 2005: 11; Pool 1991: 211); the same is reported about the beginning of the Nama–German War (Bühler 2003: 200–1).

War had been shrouded in silence at memorial occasions, while now they were twisted to be employed for historical exculpation. Nor was this all. Without consulting church authorities, a group directed by Hasso Gantze, First Chairman of the Namibian regional TSÜ chapter, entered the *Christuskirche* and held a ceremony with wreath-laying at the bronze tablets commemorating the fallen German soldiers of the colonial wars. Gantze did not miss the opportunity to distance himself from the 'leftward turn' of the German Protestant Church (AZ 31.1.2012), clearly a shot at *Präses Schneider*. Remarkably, the laying of an additional wreath, by an association in the tradition of the Nazi SS, was described in a commentary as embarrassing, with the Nazi traditionalists acting as free riders (AZ 3.2.2012). At least this incident was not taken in the jocular mode as had been the practice on earlier, comparable occasions when Nazi sentiments were aired in Namibian public (see ch. 4).

Such events show clearly that the meaning of the Rider Statue was much more than a mere tourist attraction. The statue's function as a memorial for fallen soldiers remained restricted to commemorating German soldiers who perished in the Namibian War. The Rider's main message was one of victory over anti-colonial resistance. It may be argued that at its new site it marked, more unequivocally than before, a polar position within the debate on German colonial history in Namibia. While the direct connection with the site of the concentration camp had been severed, the demonstration of military prowess was re-enforced by vicinity to the former citadel. In particular, the debates and squabbles around the relocation once again brought into the open the linkages that exist between the German speaking traditionalists and revisionists in Namibia and the groups in Germany who mask their attempts to cover up German colonial crimes by attending to innocuous tradition.

WHOSE HISTORY? WHICH HISTORY?

On Christmas Day 2013, those who had not been able or willing to flee to the coast from Windhoek's summer heat awoke to a new scene in front of the *Alte Feste*. In what was widely perceived as a 'cloak-and-dagger' operation, the Rider Statue had been cut off its pedestal and moved into the inner courtyard of the *Alte Feste*. There it is definitely out of public sight, even though it is readily accessible to anyone who bothers to enter the courtyard. It seems unlikely that this situation will change much in the foreseeable future. In particular, any idea that the Rider might return to the pedestal was forestalled only days later, when the structure was demolished by steam hammers, and the debris ferried off to the Garden Refuse and Building Rubble Deposit down Robert Mugabe Avenue. The commemorative bronze plaque was saved, slightly damaged, and laid beside the statue in the courtyard. This work, as the AZ underscored on both occasions, was performed by 'Asian workers' (AZ 13.1.2014). Remaining parts of the foundation were later used, ironically, in the construction of the base for the Genocide Memorial which was erected on the same spot (du Pisani 2015: 294).

This event brought a long process to a preliminary conclusion. This process, partly traced in this chapter, goes back at least to the thwarted efforts in the 1990s to add some comment to the monument and thus to soften its warlike message of colonial domination. As Henning Melber reminded listeners of the German programme on NBC,¹⁴ opportunities such as this had been missed and little sought after. Instead of reaching out to other groups in Namibia, German speakers – at least their audible spokespersons who quite obviously met little opposition from within the group – had for years shown an intransigent attitude. This attitude came to the fore not only during the years when the fate of the Rider was debated and hung in the balance, but also during the commemorations of 2004, the year of the centenary of the genocide and during subsequent developments (see chs 4, 5 & 11). To this must be added the effects of German government policy, especially when it comes to the issue of apology for the colonial genocide and reparation (see below, part III of this book).

While the date and the concrete circumstances of the demolition of the Rider monument may have been staged as a surprise action in the very short run, the impending action had been clearly announced by the Namibian Government. In particular, in a speech on the eve of the Heroes Day celebration on 26 August, 2013, President Hifikipunye Pohamba bemoaned the presence of a colonialist memorial in central Windhoek: 'This monument is a symbol of victory on the side of the Germans. This monument means "We have defeated them". The horse rider must be removed' (as quoted in *TN* 27.8.2014). In this way, the President articulated the obvious, as far as the meaning of the Rider was concerned; his conclusion that this symbol of colonial domination must be eliminated expressed an attitude of purging the Windhoek cityscape. In this way, the President's call shunned other possibilities, such as former initiatives of commenting on the Rider and its meaning.

There followed some debate in the media, and in mid-October, Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture Jerry Ekandjo paid an unprecedented visit to a meeting of the German Cultural Council, where he announced plans to place the Rider in the courtyard of the *Alte Feste* (AZ 21.10.2013). The government's goal was thus clearly mapped out, and any surprise lay solely in the night time removal at Christmas with minimal public notice. Even the demolition of the pedestal could have been anticipated, since it is hard to imagine how this structure could be accommodated in the courtyard. At the same time, without its monumental base, the Rider has lost much of its imposing air and has, as it were, been cut down to size. The AZ (8.12.2013), also in advance of the actual removal, quoted a museum employee that 'they' did not wish the Rider to be conspicuous and to be seen from the outside. Note that the main complaint by Eckhart Mueller, Chairman of the German Cultural Council, addressed the circumstances of the removal, whereas the complainants apparently had already resigned themselves to the new spot for the Rider inside the *Alte Feste* courtyard. The National Heritage Council had advertised the de-proclamation of the statue as national heritage in two local newspapers on December 20, 2013 (see Zeller 2007/2014).

14 Broadcast on 6.1.2014; text kindly made available to me by the author.



FIG. 6.7 The Rider statue confined to the inner courtyard of the *Alte Feste*. Photograph: Nicola Brandt.

Immediately before the actual demolition, the Council was quoted giving reasons for this decision and the intended move. In particular, the Council quoted the words of Governor Seitz on occasion of the inauguration of the monument in 1912 (see also above), when the Governor described the monument as witness of eternal German domination over Namibia. It remains the secret of Andreas Vogt, the most eloquent proponent of a different understanding of the Rider, why reference to incontrovertible historical facts can be disposed of by calling this merely ‘pretty shallow’ and ‘taken from out of the air’. In any case, the National Heritage Council went on to argue that with the demise of German control in 1915 the political meaning of the monument had expired, and it should now be placed into the museum.¹⁵ In an earlier intervention, Minister Kaapanda had given further motives, pointing expressly to a conception of history: ‘The Government will make sure that our own history is preserved by getting rid of all colonial vestiges and distortions.’¹⁶ In other words, the government was construed to be charged with formulating and projecting an official, (‘our’) history, which should be cleansed of untoward traces of the past – not unlike the problematic ‘decontaminating’ stance of the 2004 history conference in Windhoek (see chapters 1 & 5; Marx 2005).

¹⁵ All preceding quotes in this paragraph from AZ, 24.12.2013.

¹⁶ J.N. Kaapanda, MP, Minister “*Reiterdenkmal* Remnant of Lothar Von Trotha’s Extermination Order”, *Informanté*, 26.9.2013, as quoted in du Pisani 2015: 295.

Accordingly, in its new spot within the courtyard of the national museum, the statue has acquired a new and quite different meaning. It no longer forms the central part of a colonial monument, but becomes an item of the museum collections. As such, it can form a component of future display, not so much to uphold symbolically the bygone claims of domination, but to document an important aspect of the colonial past and to convey the ways this past was asserted by the colonisers.

In his August intervention, President Pohamba mentioned a further possibility: 'If they want to take it back to Germany, this is also fine. We have no objections' (as quoted in *TN* 27.8.2013). Although highly unlikely that this offer would be taken up, the President's words intimated a very close connection seen by the SWAPO leadership between German speakers in Namibia, the symbolic meaning of the Rider, and Germany, not only during colonial times but also at present. As we shall see (Part III), over the quarter century of Namibian independence, German governments have consistently refused or evaded a clear stance regarding the colonial past, and in particular, they have refused to countenance the issue of a formal apology for the genocide committed by the *Schutztruppe*. For some years now, the Namibian Government has adopted the quests and demands of the affected groups. Very obviously, a connection is made between the perceived attitude of the German Government and symbols of 'German' presence in Namibia, where the connection between German speakers and Germany is obvious, and the distinctions that exist, in terms of legal status and citizenship and also in cultural terms, are obscured.

As on previous occasions (see ch. 5), the pages of readers' letters in the *AZ* were awash with outrage and assertions of the ostensible rights of German speakers that supposedly had been violated by the actions of the Namibian authorities, which included the de-proclamation of the Rider as a national monument. In these interventions, as well as in editorial material in the paper, the above mentioned mitigating circumstances going back to August 2013 were generally disregarded, even though the *AZ* had reported on them during the preceding months. Like the President, participants in the debate did not bother too much about the niceties of distinctions between German speakers in Namibia and Germany. Apart from well worn arguments about the historical merits claimed for German speakers or the general value of 'history', for which obviously the Rider was invoked as main testimony, there were also calls for determined, punitive action.

In January 2014, the Hamburg based 'Maintenance Cooperation of Anti-Poaching Units'¹⁷ announced it would cease its 'aid deliveries' to Namibia 'with immediate effect' as a 'consequence of recent incidents: taking down of the Rider monument and ever increasing animosity towards Germans, German-ness (*Deutschtum*) and the white population in the country'. The report generated comments in the same issue, cautiously endorsing 'the consequence of a development which had generated uneasiness already for a long time' (*AZ* 23.1.2014). Several readers' interventions, significantly most of them based in Germany, also called for punitive measures against Namibia, if possible by the German Government. A letter writer from Swakopmund cautioned that such expectations were

17 Versorgungskooperation der Anti-Wilderereinheiten; the group does not seem to have a website.

based on a 'glorified image' of the German Government which would not see its interests 'in safeguarding German colonial memorials in former Protectorates (*Schutzgebiete*) or in the motherland itself'. Characteristically, the writer bemoaned the unwillingness of the German Government to acknowledge 'its fallen soldiers', regardless of the cause of the war in which they had met their death.¹⁸

This agitation seems to have been taken seriously enough to warrant an intervention by Klaus Hess, President of the German–Namibian Association (*Deutsch–Namibische Gesellschaft*). Hess noted that the removal of the Rider had been announced in advance and that this announcement had not elicited much response from the German speaking community in Namibia. Furthermore, Hess insisted that this was an internal affair of Namibia's, and he saw no reason for 'punitive action', which he considered in fact to be counterproductive (AZ 5.2.2014). Here, a spokesperson known for proximity to the German Foreign Office distanced himself from openly colonialist attitudes, which, through the medium of care for surviving memorials, claimed it was the right and even the duty of the German Government to involve itself in decision making in Namibia.

The calls for punitive action reveal more than merely a colonial attitude. These interventions take it for granted that there is a kind of world hierarchy, not only of 'development' or well-being, but apparently also of moral right. Obviously, the letter writers and to an extent the editors as well saw themselves on the upper end of that hierarchy, compared to the Namibian Government.

The response to the removal of the Rider showed two further features worth noting. On the one hand, there was a clear shift in the historical claims associated with 'German' colonial heritage. Only weeks before the demolition of the Rider, President Pohamba had announced the renaming of Lüderitzbucht, the district of Lüderitz, to !Nami#Nūs, the original Nama name of the coastal spot. The ensuing debate was largely reflected in the pages of the AZ. The paper conveyed the idea that 'the citizens' of the small coastal town were of one mind in opposing the name change, while there were indications that largely German speakers were quoted (see ch. 9). After the removal of the Rider, the two chief commentators in the AZ felt obliged to note that the action had actually been approved by a majority in the social media. The fate of the Rider then was quite clearly linked to 'Germans', not to 'citizens' at large.

In this way, at least part of the response to the removal of the Rider in late 2013 reflected what may be a discursive shift. Certainly, there were many claims that the Rider represented something of an unquestionable 'history' that was sidelined by its removal. The inevitable champion of the statue, Andreas Vogt (2014b), highlighted public interest in history and heritage. However, in a further opinion piece, Vogt (2014a) vented the idea of transporting the Rider to a German museum. This was seemingly in consonance with President Pohamba's idea cited above, but Vogt even suggested that the Rider should find its place in the German Historical Museum in Berlin, which presents a somewhat authoritative exhibition covering some thousand years of German history. In Vogt's view, this might be an appropriate measure

18 AZ 2.1.2014 (Erich Koßłowski, Swakopmund).

to 'end the policy of humiliation' of German speakers. Such an approach would also remove the statue from representing 'Namibian' history as part of the exhibition in Windhoek.

Even more importantly, Vogt's musings implied a much more sectional view of the statue than before. He related the Rider and its fate no longer to the 'public' at large, but to the German speakers whose human dignity, according to Vogt, was violated by what had happened to the statue. This attitude resonated with sentiments voiced in *AZ* readers' letters that construed the Rider as representing German speakers as an endangered minority. In addition, some letter writers associated the removal of the Rider with an imminent danger.¹⁹ In more rational terms, both strands converged in the argument that the removal of the Rider had violated rights of minorities in terms of Article 19 of the Constitution of Namibia to enjoy and practice their culture.²⁰

In a more assertive, even aggressive vein, an *AZ* commentary turned against the 'presumptuousness' of Information Minister Kaapanda, who in September 2013 had confirmed the intention to move the Rider monument since it was a 'symbol of victory'. Here also, the Rider was claimed as a symbol exclusively of German speakers. Thus, the commentary went on to say that in the interests of consistency, the 'demolition mace' that would hit the Rider would have to continue to make 'disappear roads, rails, harbours, airfields, schools, hospitals, churches and a few other buildings' (*AZ*, 27.9.2013). Apparently, the message was that all these good things in the country had been wrought by German speakers who now had reason to feel symbolically extirpated. Of course, such a narrative harks back to colonialist modernisation ideology and obliterates at least those who laboured physically to secure all these achievements. Such reasoning represents an extreme form of sectionalist thinking, claiming all and everything that is considered as a positive achievement for one's own group. In contradistinction to well established forms of alliance building which had evolved after World War II and were reflected in memory practices, now even other sections of 'whites' were excluded. Of course, it would be rash to take such assertions for manifestations of a consistent, let alone exclusive discourse. More likely, this should be considered as a window on some underlying sentiments which are seldom articulated openly.

The commentary also testifies to the anger that had accumulated well before that Christmas day. One contributor actually noted that 'it is certainly the Germans that make the largest financial contribution to the national budget' from which the writer inferred a 'right to demand that what we hold dear should be preserved and protected' (Vaatz 2014). In other words, the economically privileged and powerful position of German speakers,

19 See letter quoted in ch. 4, *AZ*, 29.1.2014 (Sonja Stoegmüller); also *AZ*, 24.1.2014 (Susanne & Helmut Lessing, Berlin). Such views dovetail with the colonial set-up of finance, which was also based on rigid sectionalism, see Kössler 2005b: 62–5.

20 Fritz Mecker, Open Letter to Namibia Heritage Council. Letter to the editor, *AZ* 5.2.2014.

in this view, translated into a special right to respect of their sentiments, regardless of any sentiments of others to the contrary.²¹

By February 2014, efforts to respond to the demolition of the Rider included collections for a national opinion survey on the statue (Vaatz 2014). This would have meant an attempt to turn the affair into a national instead of a sectional issue. The initiative came after a 'question of the week' on the Rider issue in the *AZ* had yielded responses by less than 150 persons. There was also talk of legal action. The aim of such a foray which was initiated after the removal of the statue was unclear. After all, the government's intention to place the Rider in the *Alte Feste* courtyard had been known before the demolition. To this, representatives of German speakers had – even if grudgingly – agreed. Only the precise circumstances came as a surprise. Similarly, ideas about a referendum on the Rider would appear rather awkward given the earlier insight about a 'shitstorm' in social media supporting the removal of the statue.

Feelings of insecurity as well as anger were obviously supported by the circumstances of the removal. The day chosen for this action suggested a wish on the part of decision makers to get it over with while few people were around. Police cordons that were deployed well ahead of the beginning of the actual work, and also restrictions on reporting and photography after its completion, underscored a desire on the part of authorities to act outside public scrutiny. As happens frequently in such cases, the opposite effect was achieved. There were also protests in the English language press in Namibia against these proceedings which clearly flew in the face of participatory politics and transparency (*TN*, 7.1.2014; 10.1.2014).

On the other hand, some German speakers for once felt called upon to voice dissenting views from those put forth by the *AZ*. One writer recalled that the monument had been 'the glorification of the so-called "*Schutztruppe*", which has on its conscience the killing of tens of thousands of people' and therefore the Rider was in fact 'embarrassing' for Namibians of German descent. The letter writer called for an 'African–Namibian memorial place for Namas and Hereros' at the place where formerly the Rider had stood.²² Interestingly, Hugh Ellis (2014) reminded his readers of the positive aspects of 'German–Namibian heritage' that might be blotted out by a fixation on the Rider – such as 'the German–Namibian lawyers who defended freedom fighters in court', or 'admittedly few' resisters to the military draft. In this way, Ellis stressed that remembered 'history' is not something cast in iron, but is open to elective decisions about which aspects and personages should be highlighted and commemorated, which image of past groups and nations may be considered worthy of priority and be projected into the public sphere. Inevitably, by doing so, other aspects are not necessarily denied or obliterated, but they do remain in the shadows. In a similar vein, Nghidipo Nangolo (2014) mapped out a creative approach, after 'the removal of

21 It is only fair to note the distance from such sentiments, and also from the idea of taking legal action, by prominent German speaking interview partners in March 2014 (interviews with Gunther von Schumann, Scientific Society of Namibia, Dieter Esslinger Arbeits- und Fördergemeinschaft der Deutschen Schulvereine in Namibia [AGDS] Monika Hoffmann and Gabriele Moldzio, both German Cultural Council). Still, these more sober attitudes did not find expression in public.

22 *TN*, 17.1.2014, email by Bernd Rügen



FIG. 6.8 Front of Independence Memorial Museum with statue of founding president Sam Nujoma presenting the Namibian Constitution. Photograph: Jonathan West.

the *Reiterdenkmal* is now water under the bridge': 'The hope is that the removal of the *Reiterdenkmal* will usher in new ideas of forging national emblems and statues that will survive the reign of political parties and regime changes, to create durable harmony among all Namibian citizenry.'²³

Outside the *Alte Feste*, there remains a teaser for active critics to literally de-construct the Rider and its martial attitude. The cue is that Beukes' and Klinger's still all too neglected mural has survived the Rider. The mural's peaceful, but zestful and in some ways utopian message may not fit the circumstances of the removal of the Rider. However, the message

23 For further responses outside the German speaking community, see Elago 2015: 289–91.

behind the symbolic brass chunks of the statue, flying off into the air so that the peaceful white rabbit can sit on the pedestal, might be seen in the end to have proven more sustainable than warlike gestures.

Another possibility for engaging the Rider statue as well as the violent colonial heritage for which it stands has been explored by Nicola Brandt and Tanya Dawidow. Starting with a photo documentation of the relocation of the statue which was shown in Swakopmund in late 2010, they moved beyond their initial, decidedly neutral attitude (AZ, 24.12.2009) 'to explore other sites that reference the country's socio-political heritage and transformation'.²⁴ More recent photographic work by Nicola Brandt shows disconcerting confrontations with the history of genocide and the ways it is reflected in often quite inconspicuous forms in the present.²⁵ Precisely by reporting seemingly trivial, even banal practices a sense can be conveyed of how pervasive the consequences of colonial violence and of the genocide in particular still are.

The removal of the Rider monument turned out not to be the end of the story. With the finalisation and opening of the Independence Memorial Museum, the two spots where the Rider once stood have been occupied by new memorials. The original position of the Rider is now taken over by a monumental statue of Founding President Sam Nujoma, holding aloft the Namibian Constitution. The spot in front of the *Alte Feste*, where the Rider had a temporary position, is now filled by the Genocide Memorial. In clear contestation of the colonial memory register, a new ensemble has been created that speaks to the suffering of the African majority by the colonial war and to the eventual achievement of majority rule as enshrined in the Constitution. Regardless of artistic merit, supplanting a statue of a member of *Schutztruppe* presenting his rifle by a figure (the founding president) holding up the democratically adopted Constitution must represent more than a sea change. This new arrangement is wrought with its own controversies and problems.²⁶ However, when seen in the perspective of the colonial memorial ensemble that has been broken up and in part replaced, the change symbolises the overcoming of colonialism.

24 http://nicolabrandt.com/pdf/Memorial_Landscapes_of_Namibia_by_Nicola%20Brandt.pdf (accessed 5.5.2015)

25 On the photo exhibition *The Earth Inside*, see in particular Kleinschmidt 2014; *Namibia Economist*, 18.7.2014; *TN*, 18.8.2014.

26 Some of these are addressed in chapter 12 and in the conclusion.

7

Communal Reconstruction and Subaltern Traditions

AS DESCRIBED PREVIOUSLY (IN CHS 1 & 5), THE NAMIBIAN WAR RESULTED IN LARGE-SCALE destruction not only of the lives of many, but in some cases even of a majority, of the communities that had put up resistance against colonialism. Ensuing colonial legislation also was aimed at the strategic destruction of the very foundations on which the survivors might have attempted to rebuild and continue communal life. In particular, this destruction concerned the wholesale expropriation of land and the virtual ban on the possession of large stock, as well as the obligation to enter wage labour, which amounted to a forced labour system backed up by strict measures of surveillance in the form of pass tags (metal disc worn around the neck) and the ill-famed *Dienstbuch*¹, an early version of the later passes.

Moreover, the German colonial administration pursued plans for sweeping deportations of survivors of the genocide. We have seen (ch. 1) that such plans involved a wholesale exchange of populations between the northern and the southern portions of the Police Zone, bringing Ovaherero to the south and Nama to the north. Furthermore, designs aimed to deport Namibian groups who were considered particularly dangerous, such as Witbooi, to other German colonies, either in Africa or in the Pacific. Most of these plans, geared to bureaucratic, if no less inherently violent, approaches of a ‘gardening state’, turned out to be ‘fantasies of omnipotence’, but they should not be considered lightly. Such plans document ‘the extent to which German colonial rule laid claim to domination as well as the extent of its bureaucratism’ (Krüger 1999: 135, 141).

Not all these designs remained pipe-dreams. Consider the fate of the Witbooi, the bulk of whom had been deported, in violation of the original terms of surrender, first to the

1 Literally, ‘service book’ or record.

Windhoek concentration camp and later to Shark Island.² As late as 1911, another group, comprising members of various Nama groups besides Witbooi, was deported to Dschang in the grassland region of Cameroon (cf. Kössler 2005b: 182). Significantly, the missionary at Gibeon reported sweeping revisions in his operations since for some time very few Nama speakers were left at his station, while there was a considerable influx of Otjiherero speakers, and great fluctuation among his flock.³ Overall, between 1912 and 1913, a quarter of the surviving Ovaherero were thought to live in the south and at the coast, and more Ovaherero than Nama were living in the southern district of Gibeon (Reichs-Kolonialamt 1914: Statistical Annexe, 46–7; Bley 1968: 250).

The policy of control and of reordering the distribution of population groups in the Police Zone was by no means as water tight and effective as bureaucratic fiat would have it. One may debate whether various forms of covert or manifest resistance actually undid to an extent ‘the turning of Africans into a proletariat in the European sense’ (Krüger 1999: 185), or whether the fact that ‘90 percent of the African male population in the Police Zone were employed as wage labourers’ by 1912 indicated overall success of the colonial strategy (Werner 1998: 54). In any case, ‘a persistent and secret movement among Africans to reassemble’ (Bley 1968: 215) was underway in spite of bureaucratic controls. In this way, the colonialist project of surveillance and ‘dissolution of the tribes’ (Bley 1968: 213) ran into serious difficulty: The pervasive shortage of labour power, which had been anticipated by Trotha’s colonialist German critics, became a reality.

In this way, the bargaining power of Africans employed in the Police Zone improved considerably. Even under the constraints of the Native Ordinances, they were able to wrest concessions from their employers (Prein 1994: 103). Thus, Africans could build up herds of small stock when farmers saw themselves forced to pay in kind and constrained to give in to demands to allow these animals to be grazed on their land. Similarly, Africans managed to trace relatives and friends and rebuilt small local nuclei as well as larger networks (Krüger 1999: 193). Farmers and officials had to accede to situations where chiefs assumed half-formalised roles as location headmen and also as informal leaders, and once again gathered people around them, as has been described in particular for Ovaherero (Prein 1994: 110–2). Moreover, labourers were able to withdraw from their places of work in search of better opportunities (Krüger 1999: 187), and even for fugitives, control was not always very effective, as attested in the ‘autobiography’ of Hosea Kutako who managed several times to escape from prison as well as from workplaces, or to evade capture.⁴

Importantly, all this was predicated on a refusal to ‘recognise’ the results of the Namibian War, in particular, land alienation (Krüger 1999: 189). Thus, the sustained drives by Ovaherero to once again obtain cattle can be seen as an attempt to adapt their ‘traditional idioms of social relations’ to colonial conditions (Prein 1994: 107). In other words, they did not act as wage workers, but anticipated their goal: reconstitution as independent pastoralists.

2 See testimony contained in petitions by Witbooi to the South African authorities in Kössler 1999b: 50–2.

3 See detailed documentation in Kössler 2005b: 313, fn. 717; also Goldblatt 2010: 183.

4 See Goldblatt 2010: 112; also the fictionalised testimony of a young Ovaherero woman in Serebrov 2013.

Pursuit of such a 'full peasant solution', or 'self-peasantisation', however, involved 'important innovation' in productive strategies (Ranger 1985: 31; Werner 1998: 57).

The silent regrouping that took place, in this way, among Ovaherero, happened elsewhere as well. In Gibeon, the Rhenish Mission church had been blown up by German troops during the war, ostensibly for 'strategic' reasons. It was rebuilt and rededicated in 1913, obviously with the participation of Witbooi who had slowly drifted back to the place considered to be their traditional capital (cf. Kössler 2005b: 314, fn. 723). In this particular case, such small-scale relocation processes showed temporal overlap with deportation. Deportees were able to return from Cameroon only around the time when the church was rededicated. In this way, the process of return and communal reassembling was contradictory and somewhat ambiguous in character.

In any case, the idea that 'peace of the graveyard' (Drechsler 1980: 231) reigned in Namibia after 1907 must be qualified in important ways. The seeds were laid for the emergence of African groups and networks that were able to formulate and pursue strategic aims. Overall, these groups referred their collective identities to the ethnic groups and clusters that had figured during the late 19th Century as well as during the Namibian War. However, such identity constructs did not imply that the shattered communities were resurrected in exactly the same fashion as they had existed before the war; apart from the tremendous losses of lives and possessions, precisely the measures of the colonial power prevented this. If the colonial state and its agents were unable to fully impose their will on Africans and to mould them into an atomised proletariat, African agency in turn was under grave constraints that had been created to a large extent by the colonisers. There was no turning back to pre-colonial times, and the colonised people found themselves in a clearly subaltern position.

Under such conditions, Africans mobilised such resources as they were able to muster in this historic situation. This process involved considerable adaptation and innovation. The turn toward the Christian mission offered spiritual orientation and relief, besides a limited measure of protection from worst excesses of state and settler power. Conversion also opened spaces for communication, and to some extent organisation, under the overall conditions set by colonial domination. Or, as Heinrich Vedder put it from a missionary perspective and with a view particularly to Ovaherero: The loss of cattle precluded ancestor worship, and 'now the Christian community offered both a new religion and a union of the nation in the community with their leaders and Herero elders' (Vedder 1928: 201; cf. Gewald 1999: 197). The ban on ownership of cattle had broken the link to the ancestors, and the missionaries and the new form of community stepped in (Sundermeier 1973: 86–8).

The spaces thus gained were themselves contested, as missionaries, at least at times, did not find it easy to exert the kind of control they intended to impose. One instance that occurred in 1913 was the symbolical donning of top-hats against the express ban by the missionary (Prein 1994: 99–100). Eventually, a 'crisis of trust' developed within a situation where missionaries 'increasingly accommodated to the German colonial masters' and thus separated from their African congregations (Sundermeier 1973: 88; Engel 2012: 216–27).

In a more far-reaching development, young boys recruited as *Bambusen* or orderlies to serve military officers of the colonial army adapted to military ways and drill. As Gewald

(1999: 206) points out, these men, recruited as ‘juveniles’ were ‘young men’ ten years later when they wielded considerable power, even though in traditional terms, still in ‘uninitiated status as boys’. This power suddenly evaporated once the German army was defeated. The situation of the former *Bambusen* points to at least one avenue for syncretistic practices, featuring among other things military dress and military ceremony that emerged later, most famously in the form of the *oturupa* or *Truppenspieler* (see below).

Thus, when as a result of the South African occupation of Namibia, German colonial rule came to an end in 1915, certain forms of communicative nexuses as well as residential nuclei were already budding or in place. To this should be added more far-flung networks of communication. These connections could then serve as a basis for the re-constitution of communal life, albeit in a remoulded form. Contemporary observers noted the move ‘home’ of various Ovaherero chiefs and their followers after the South African occupation. Such groups established themselves in old centres such as Okahandja, Waterberg or Omaruru. Some of the leading personages arrived from exile in South Africa and Botswana. Such moves were linked to sustained drives to build up herds, above all of large stock (Krüger 1999: 198–9).

At Gibeon, the sons of the old *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi arrived from exile, which they had spent in north central Namibia. As the resident missionary reported, they donned their typical hats with white cloth wound around the crown, and introduced discipline and order among the local people. Moreover, they also installed a communal government along their old lines, and officials were appointed to control a territory reaching from Gibeon to Maltahöhe in the north-west and to Goamus in the south-east. Eventually, this strenuous effort at institutional reconstruction sparked a police investigation, which brought to light an elaborate structure and hierarchy which, according to one statement, went back to a council first formed in 1907 (cf. Kössler 2005b: 187–96). News about such activities contributed towards projections of fear and apprehension amongst settlers. Consequently, in the region of Gibeon, as well as further north in Herero regions, there were pervasive rumours amongst settlers about an impending new African insurrection (Krüger 1999: 197–8).

In this way, some initial forms of a reconstructed communal life came to the fore at the earliest possibility, in a phase of relaxed control by colonial authorities. Hopes for fundamental change were sparked by expectations on the arrival of the ‘Englishman’, as the South African troops were framed. To Africans in Namibia, this event appeared as a promise that wrongs suffered by Africans during the past two decades would now be set right. Even thirty years later, Friedrich Maharero claimed there had been assurances by the South Africans, connected with their request for auxiliary soldiers, that ‘the country . . . would be given back to Samuel [Maharero] and his people’ (Troup 1950: 57). The first visit to Namibia by the Governor General of South Africa in 1919 marked a peak of such hopes, and it was even claimed that in his speeches, Lord Sidney Buxton had ‘promised the Hereros the old freedom along with great possessions of land and unlimited herds of cattle’ (Vedder 1928: 162). Leading Witbooi pronounced their long-standing sympathies for the ‘English’ as well (cf. Kössler 2005b: 182–3), and similar sentiments were heard from the Red Nation at Hoachanas (Emmett 1999: 98).

The few years of 'temporary loss of control' (Krüger 1999: 196) before South Africa secured the League of Nations mandate over Namibia were important for the formation of a distinct, even though subaltern, vindictory politics. This notion addresses efforts by colonised people to grapple with the exigencies of a colonial rule that they cannot expect to dislodge within the foreseeable future. In the case of southern and central Namibia, under conditions imposed by colonialism and beyond actors' control, such politics still strove towards re-asserting communal ties and goals.⁵ One reason for the advance of such politics was the palpable, if limited and transitory, improvement in the position of Africans experienced during this transitory period.

The upsurge of communal reconstruction was underpinned by informal occupation of land, which was used to keep the herds that had been built up in limited ways during the closing years of German rule and now grew rapidly in size. However, these developments should not shroud the substantial losses sustained by communities such as Bondelswarts and Rehoboth Basters during the military campaign in 1914 and 1915 (Silvester 1998: 99). Still, along with other favourable conditions, such as good rains and an advantageous market position, there was an overall amelioration in 'the conditions of blacks and . . . promise for improvements in the future' (Emmett 1999: 91). Also, for a few years, Africans could largely evade control by moving onto unoccupied land, which must have appeared to have been a big step towards the reconstruction of independent life. Apart from pastoralism, this included the option of 'living off the veld', and the large number of dogs Africans owned at the time may indicate the importance of hunting (Emmett 1999: 85).

Obviously, hopes that were pinned on these changes and fleeting opportunities were not fulfilled, even in the medium term. Once South African rule had been consolidated and the League of Nations mandate secured in 1921, the new colonial power started to pursue its real objectives vigorously. Africans found themselves at the receiving end of a 'native policy' that was custom made to enforce strict segregation and the vigorous mobilisation of African labour, along with a rapid influx of white settlers mainly from South Africa.

Legal instruments to control labour were already in place and had been formally retained with certain modifications from German legislation throughout the period of military rule (Werner 1998: 72–3; Emmett 1999: 75–84). Subsequently, the South African administration moved towards a fresh re-ordering of space. This involved, among other things, the creation of a 'native reserve' system. Informal or 'temporary' reserves were closed down and new ones identified. The setting up of these reserves was deemed permanent. Africans were apportioned reserves mainly on the eastern, to some extent also the western, fringes of white settlement. For their agropastoral activities, they were restricted largely to these areas, and above all, the system was designed in such a way as to push people onto the labour market to serve the settler economy (cf. Kössler 2005b: 35–62; Werner 1998: 75–79, 97–104).

5 Writing on late 19th Century South Africa, John Saul has summed up this phase of resistance by referring to people 'who felt there was now no alternative to acceptance of the fact of conquest but who hoped, nonetheless, to bend the new situation to African advantage' (Saul & Bond 2014: 47). The term of revindictory movements goes back to Sigrist 1973.

In addition, spatial reordering extended to the sustained drive to attract large numbers of white settlers, mainly from South Africa but also groups of 'Angola Boers'. The establishment of these settlers in the country was subsidised from the South West African budget, while expenditure for 'native affairs' lagged behind (Werner 1998: 91–2). Emmett points to the economic irrationality of this massive and heavily subsidised settlement drive, which resulted in a per capita allocation of land to whites 28 times higher than to blacks (Emmett 1999: 95, 103). Such state sponsored development of white farms created new forms of dependence for Africans, who were restricted to small reserves and had to ask their employers for permission to graze their own stock. This was predicated on the good will of farmers and the bargaining power of the workers (Silvester 1998: 109–111). The policy restrained African life chances in other ways as well. Thus, the drilling of boreholes on the Kalk Plateau east of Gibeon, which was opened for settler farmers during this period, was blamed for the drying up of fountains at the foot of the escarpment.⁶

Meanwhile, the requests from Witbooi representatives for adequate land were ignored, and eventually only the small Krantzplatz Reserve was allocated to various groups of Africans residing in Gibeon district (cf. Kössler 2005b: 196–211). In central Namibia, existing temporary reserves which largely accommodated Ovaherero had clearly proven too small for the residents' livestock (Werner 1998: 99). The dispensation of the Reserve Commission in 1921 meant that Ovaherero were pushed out of well-watered areas to be resettled along the eastern border in regions with 'lack of water and inadequate pastures' (Werner 1998: 103). Hosea Kutako summed up the problems by pointing out that the proposed reserves were 'a country only good for wild beasts', and lack of open water made them 'no use for a whole nation'. Eventually, some Ovaherero moved into the new reserves only under the direct threat of violence, including the demonstration of aerial bombs (Werner 1998: 105).

Hosea Kutako further pointed out that 'We are the original inhabitants of S.W.A. and we know the best and the worst parts of the whole country' (Werner 1998: 105). In much the same way, leading Witbooi had pointed to their local knowledge when petitioning the administration for places they felt were fit for the entire group to live in (cf. Kössler 1999b: 53–4). However, this was not the goal pursued by the administration. The latter not only based its policy on the premise that in the Police Zone, there were no longer 'unbroken tribes' (U. of SA 1923: 12); moreover, any means to reconstitute such 'tribes' were systematically denied. The idea was that South African officials should be in charge and considered by Africans as their leaders, with the administrator in the mantle of paramount chief. It was for such reasons that Friedrich Maharero was denied recognition as paramount after his father's decease in 1923 (Werner 1998: 107), and that the title of *Kaptein (Gaob)* was consistently denied to pretenders amongst Nama (cf. Kössler 2005b: 225–32).

As a consequence of such considerations, the reserves were technically not allocated to ethnic groups, and the chiefs of these groups were not recognised as such but merely co-opted as lowly 'headmen' within the reserve institutional structure (cf. Kössler: 49–58). In

6 Halbjahrsbericht vom 1. Oktober 1928 bis 31. März 1929, Gibeon, 2. April 1929 (Christian Spellmeyer) VEM/RMG 2.500.

all respects, this fell far short of the hopes Africans had pinned on the change of colonial masters, and protest as well as outright resistance began to form during the 1920s. This became widely visible in the Bondelswarts Rebellion in 1922 and the Rehoboth Rebellion in 1925, but also, in limited ways, took organised forms in the spread of the Industrial and Commercial Union from South Africa and of the Garveyist Universal Negro Improvement Association from the United States.

One of the early expressions of widespread 'disillusionment' with the consequences of South African rule was the spread of Garveyism in various parts of central Namibia. Apparently, this movement, in particular its millenarian elements, thrived on a widespread feeling of 'powerlessness' and 'boost(ed) the morale of the colonised' (Emmett 1999: 147–9): Moreover, in Emmett's view, this coalesced into 'optimism and militancy' that in 1922 and 1923 gave some grounds for ongoing rumours about an impending insurrection. Even though the Rehoboth Rebellion in 1925 may be seen as a high point of a larger wave of resistance, and the airforce demonstrations used by the South African authorities to quell it were spread to other parts of the Police Zone as well, this 'first phase of popular resistance' petered out soon after, probably partly on account of the external bases of the organised nuclei, in particular of Garveyism and its focus on a salvation that was also expected to come from the outside, from America (Emmett 1999: 154, 164–5).

In the longer run, the most noted feature by which African identity was articulated and projected was the emergence of the *oturupa* (*otjiserandu*, or '*Truppspieler*'). First reports on these groups come from the intermittent period of 'tentative liberalism' (Emmett 1999: 229). At the time, such practices were followed mainly, though not exclusively, by Ovaherero. However, the movement struck roots only in Ovaherero culture and today can be considered a very distinct ethnic marker. The *oturupa* complemented the interrelated 'processes of resettlement and stock accumulation . . . by efforts to establish local and regional social networks' (Krüger & Henrichsen 1998: 151; cf. Krüger 1999: 223; Werner 1990). The syncretistic military uniforms and drill that characterise *oturupa* may to some extent be traced to pre-colonial Herero practice and changes before the Namibian War. Thus, Henrichsen reports incipient adaptation of routines from the colonial military during the early German colonial period, not least among rebellious youths who 'parodied the German colonial military in a sense of colonial mimicry and thus posed as their equals' and at the same time, opposed the traditional hierarchies (Henrichsen 2011: 293–4). Another strand concerned needs and opportunities that arose after the Namibian War and during South African occupation: the military experience of young men as *Bambusen* (as mentioned earlier) and the importance of wide-ranging connections, along with features of a friendly society, giving aid in case of travel and general support when needed (Gewald 1999: 204–6).

The emergence of the *oturupa* was linked to extensive developments on a range of levels, all of which can be regarded as forming part of communal reconstruction, be it a process of 'self-peasantisation' (Werner 1998) or the symbolic reoccupation of traditional, sacred places, in particular gravesites (Krüger 1999: 274–90; below, ch. 8). The sustained quest for a reconstitution of communal life, its forms and basic preconditions among Ovaherero went

along with a strong turn away from the Rhenish Mission, which was by then seen by many as an accomplice of colonial power. Since rituals and customs such as the holy fire, male circumcision or polygamy were ostracised by the missionaries, their re-adoption almost by necessity implied taking a confrontational stance vis-à-vis the missionaries, and in the end, withdrawal from the mission (Werner 1998: 109–23; Vedder 1928: 202).

These processes were closely linked to the frustration of the hope people had placed in the South African occupation. Disappointment was particularly related to the paltry land allotments that the new administration gave to Africans under the guise of reserves. These contrasted strongly with aspirations that Ovaherero leaders had articulated when meeting Lord Buxton during the initial phase of South African rule. They had asked for ‘a piece of land where we can live as a nation and where our families can grow into a nation’. Furthermore, they bemoaned being ‘scattered’ and requested of ‘the Government to put us together so that we again become a nation . . . From the Herero-war till now we have been scattered far and wide. We have been captives long enough, we want to be free’.⁷ As Krüger (1999: 202) observes, the projection of a nation yet to be formed reflects an implicit acknowledgement that the days of the ‘old Herero clans’ and their rights to land were definitely gone. Consequently, the new colonial power appears to have been the only one to whom one could appeal in order to secure the prerequisites of actually *forming* a ‘nation’, not in the sense of a sovereign state, but certainly aiming at consolidating a closer communal nexus, predicated on sufficient and coherent land holdings.

The same motives of the traumatic experience of wandering, being scattered and harried are reflected in the long petitions drawn up by leading Witbooi about the same time (see Kössler 1999b: 47–55). Here as well, the quest was for land as a foundation for decent communal life and as a ‘place to sit’ (*zitplek*). Even though the language of nation is not as prominent here, the experiences both groups had undergone since the end of the Namibian War were framed in very similar fashion, above all in the existential need for a home that also would afford a sustainable living. As has been seen before, the reserve dispensation that was eventually implemented in Namibia was premised on very different aims. The reserve system drew immediate protest from Ovaherero, and in southern Namibia, in the emblematic case of the Witbooi leadership, such protest was not long in coming (cf. Kössler 2005b: 211–6, 1999b: 56–7).

The discontent that fed into covert and sometimes open struggle, often related to land and on a daily basis to the restrictions imposed on Africans by colonial rule and regulations, found one expression in communal commemorations which began during the same period. These commemorations, which will be discussed in the following chapter, mostly took their cue from the central event remembered in history, the Namibian War. As a generic feature, these events are rooted in the period of early South African rule in Namibia, even if their observation right down to the present forms an important and recurrent intervention into Namibian memory politics and their relationship to Germany, the concerns which form the primary interest of this analysis.

7 NAN NAW 28/1919/1, Herero Address [to Governor General Lord Buxton], 1919, as quoted by Werner 1998: 109; Krüger & Henrichsen 1998: 152.



Under the boot of German colonialism: view of *Christuskirche* and the city centre from the *Reiterdenkmal* in its original position. Photograph: Nicola Brandt.

Nazi emblem, with 1938 date, found in a remote part of the Namib Desert. Photograph: John Kinahan.

The subaltern voice: the
Rider has been given a
Namibian flag. Photograph:
Reinhart Kössler.



Poster published by South
West Breweries, ca 1968.
Poster Collection, Basler
Afrika Bibliographien,
Ref. no. X 641.



Founding President Sam Nujoma holding the Namibian Constitution. Photograph: Jonathan West.



Women paying respects to the ancestral chiefs at their grave sites, Okahandja, Herero Day 2006. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.



Parade of women, Omaruru, October 2007. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.





Nama stap performance,
Gibeon 2007.
Photograph: Reinhart
Kössler.



Ceremonial salvo at
graveside of *Kaptein* Isaak
Witbooi and memorial for
Witbooi slain in the battle
of Hornkranz and re-buried
in Gibeon, Gibeon 2007.
Photograph: Reinhart
Kössler.

FACING PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:

Re-enactment of Hendrik Witbooi's last battle, Gibeon 2005. Photograph:
Hans Pieters.

Concluding parade by horse riders after re-enactment, Gibeon 2007. Note
riders presenting their distinctive Witbooi hats as a token of affiliation.
Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

Horse riders during re-enactment, representing German soldiers, Gibeon
2007. Note white hats hanging in the trees behind. Photograph: Reinhart
Kössler.

Ceremony at memorial
for the death of Hendrik
Witbooi (second from right,
Chief Joel Stephanus,
second from left, Rt Hon.
Willem Konjore), Vaalgras
2008. Photograph:
Cristiana Fiamingo.



Hoisting of flags (from
left to right: Namibia,
African Union, Vaalgras,
Mbanderu, Herero Red
Band), Vaalgras 2008.
Photograph: Reinhart
Koessler.





Members of the Namibian delegation at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin in 2011.

Above, from left: in side view, *Kaptein* Dawid Frederick; facing camera, Ida Hoffman; right, Miriam Rukoro, wife of Ovaherero Paramount Chief Vekuui Rukoro.

Left, Mbanderu Queen Aletha Nguvauva.

Photographs: Reinhart Kössler.



The memorial stone depicting Jacob Marengo unveiled by President Pohamba in Warmbad, October 25, 2008. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.



Demonstration on the occasion of the 130th anniversary of the closing of the Berlin Africa Conference, February 28, 2015, Berlin Wilhelmstrasse, at the site of Bismarck's Official Residence as Chancellor. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

8

Constructing and Claiming Identities and Spaces: Commemorations in Southern and Central Namibia¹

TO THE CASUAL OBSERVER, IT MAY APPEAR SOMEWHAT STARTLING TO SEE WIDESPREAD memory practices across central and southern Namibia relating to events from more than a century ago. It seems that in other African states and regions, public memory relates much less to such early colonial experience, and as previously noted, in Namibia the northern regions differ markedly in this respect from the central and southern regions. The same is true of the prevailing official rendering of the history of anti-colonial resistance and the liberation war (cf. ch. 1). If we consider other former German colonies in Africa with grave experiences of mass violence, such as Tanzania or Cameroon, the situation differs strongly from that found in central and southern Namibia. In any case, the Namibian War and the genocide it entailed loom large in the memories of Namibians in the south and centre today, most of whom have strong relational ties with victims and survivors. The centre stage position underlines the incisive and traumatic character of these experiences of large-scale atrocity. Moreover, such centrality is also experienced by many German speakers in the region, even though mostly with diametrically opposed evaluations and conclusions (see chs 4–6). In the following, I shall take a closer look at some of the memory practices, more precisely annual commemorations, that have evolved among Ovaherero and Nama groups.

To many observers, the extent of communal reconstitution and reconstruction that emerged during the initial years of South African rule came as a surprise. These developments were in stark contrast to the discourses on ‘dying peoples’ that had been rife amongst missionaries and colonialists during the latter half of the 19th Century. Such discourses had

1 This chapter is based and expands on Kössler 2010b and 2011a.

existed well before the Namibian War, but they were obviously reinforced by the cataclysm of 1904–08. As we have seen, reconstruction did not bring back the old times. Colonial rule continued under a new guise, and the hopes Africans had pinned on the ‘Englishman’ – the arrival of the South African army – were bitterly frustrated.

At the same time, the extent of communal reconstruction attested to the energy and creativity that were inherent in African communities. Groups did not and could not merely reassemble. Under German and then also under South African colonial rule, people had to adapt to new and generally harsh conditions. These conditions were predicated on the needs and goals of the colonisers, and thus revolved around their dual requirements of land and labour power. Living conditions for Africans therefore remained drastically worse than they had been before the Namibian War. Regimentation in the interests of the procurement of labour power continued more or less unabated under South African rule, and the creation of reserves did not satisfy in any way the needs and aspirations of African communities. In all these ways, conditions imposed on Africans translated into challenges for organising survival and gaining a basis for the reconstruction of communal life.

Against such a grim backdrop, communal reconstruction was linked to important innovations. The most conspicuous of these among Ovaherero was the appearance of the *oturupa* movement, which was linked to the first clear articulation of an overall Ovaherero ‘nation’ that now formed after the near-destruction and dispersal of the former communities (Sundermeier 1977: 123–4; Krüger 1999: 209). For this process of resurgence and finding a new nexus, the reburial of Samuel Maharero on 26 August 1923 in Okahandja is considered the pivotal date. Unexpected by many, above all by the colonial authorities and the Rhenish missionaries, a massive turnout attested to a newly found conscience of commonality. According to oral tradition, one of the *oturupa* generals pledged on this occasion that Ovaherero would return annually to mark this event. It is claimed that the Okahandja event was taken as a template for other commemorations, such as Zeraeua Day in Omaruru or Nikodemus Day in Okaseta/Gunichas (cf. Krüger 1999: 283–7; Sundermeier 1977: 124, 131).

Currently, numerous annual commemorations (*omazemburukiro*) are observed by Ovaherero, focused on gravesides that can be related to central events in the history of the respective groups, and also on battlefields, above all Ohamakari. Generally, these memory practices relate predominantly to the Ovaherero–German War (cf. Förster 2008a, 2010: 248–62). The trajectories of Nama commemorations are less clear. As we shall see, Heroes Day in Gibeon, aka *Witbooi fees*, goes back a long way. Other annual events seem to have proliferated particularly during recent years. The most conspicuous among these has been publicised quite widely, namely the commemoration of the death in February 1907 of Cornelius Frederick, leader of !Aman of Bethanie during the Nama–German War. Since 2007, this commemoration has been held on Shark Island, the site of the concentration camp in !Nami#Nūs (Lüderitz) where Frederick had been prisoner (see ch. 11).

RITUAL AND COMMUNAL RESILIENCE

The commemorations to be detailed below straddle two distinct realms and concerns. First of all, these events relate to religion and spirituality. In this way, they are closely linked to the notion of ritual (see Bell 1992, 1997), particularly with reference to ancestors. Secondly, the commemorations appeal to (national) politics with their specific rituals related to sovereignty and loyalty to the state. Also on this account, the specific quality of ritual in these events lies in their being clearly and distinctly framed as described below (cf. Jungaberle & Weinhold 2006). These events are quite specific occurrences, set off clearly from everyday life.

First and foremost, such framing happens on account of the *places* where the events in question are staged. These places are closely related to the content that is commemorated. Generally, commemorations are held at traditional communal centres and/or at important sites of historical events. Therefore, many participants need to undertake long journeys in order to attend. In many cases these trips also involve a return to a rural 'home' from an urban dwelling place where many community members reside to earn a living.² There is also specific dress, both in terms of finery and ethnic markers, in particular among Ovaherero, with uniforms for men and typical dresses for women, as well as the chosen colours of the three flags. Nama groups also sport distinct colours that identify each group, most conspicuously by scarves wound around men's hats, but also by sashes and dresses. The typical hats were first reported for the Witbooi, but by now have proliferated widely, albeit in different colours.

Furthermore, the ritual is marked off in *time*, by its formal opening and closing. Not only in Namibia, these temporal markings are visualised most clearly in the ceremonial hoisting and lowering of various flags, and these regularly include the Namibian and African Union flags, alongside the flags of particular groups. Such flag ceremonies include the singing of the appropriate anthems. Such procedures set these ceremonies firmly within a communal, national and also African framework. Christian religious services and prayers add a further dimension. Among the events detailed below, these features are conspicuous in particular in Gibeon and Omaruru. Additional important paraphernalia include the show of horse riders as well as, in very limited ways, of firearms. These features are present in specific forms and combinations in each particular event. Over the years, each event also varies considerably in the arrangement and extensiveness of its programme.

The combination of such diverse forms adds up to specifically composite and syncretistic profiles particular to each of the commemoration practices. In this way, the commemorations bear out 'the capacity' of ritual 'to act in diverse ways on a contradictory world'. In all these cases, ritual is marked further by 'continuing tension with more mundane modes of action' and openness 'to the accumulation of new associations and referents' (Comaroff & Comaroff

2 For an extensive discussion of the increasing importance of 'home' in many parts of Africa as well as Western Europe, see Geschiere 2009.

1993: xxi). As has been noted for national events elsewhere, an 'alliance between the nation and enjoyment' in such commemorations is not a contradiction at all (König 2008: 423).

The commemorations clearly act on the outside world by influencing the received, official image of the past. At the same time, such action is intertwined with a broad range of concerns that revolve around the reproduction of communal nexuses.³ This view challenges a received notion of cultural memory, related practically exclusively to scripture and associated repositories. In a rarely reflected bias reminiscent of 'high culture' prejudice, oral traditions and ritual are relegated to a realm that in evolutionary terms is set clearly *before* such achievements.⁴ It has been shown, at least by implication, that reality does not actually bear out such notions (cf. esp. Hofmeyr 1994; Biwa 2010, 2012). Yet since this is an ongoing debate badly in need of input from non-European perspectives, it is important to point to the ways ritual commemorations can and do influence public memory.

Content to which rituals may refer is also multi-dimensional. The pervasive appeal to the ancestors and commemoration of their fate and exploits clearly evokes a central spiritual dimension. In this connection, memories of the Namibian War remind of hosts of unaccounted fates and unburied bodies, as well as of the deportation of human remains connected to the colonial genocide. In this way, these commemorations have been characterised as 'prolonged wakes'. Biwa also points to the 'highly stylised structure of oral transmissions and performances with sophisticated mnemonic codes' that are enacted at commemorations, certainly at those staged by Nama communities (Biwa 2012: 1, 128).

All this is linked inextricably to the very practical concerns of present day politics both at a communal and national level. On these levels, as Memory Biwa (2010: 352–5, 2012: 148) notes, power differentials and hegemonic relationships are played out within the communal nexuses. Such contests also concern the representation of the past. Each particular presentation then appears as 'a negotiated merger' of contents and concerns adapted to the needs 'at a particular time in the growth of the community' (Biwa 2012: 168).

Increasingly during recent years, such concerns have included demands directed both to the Namibian and to the German governments for adequate recognition and consideration of the consequences of the genocide committed by the German colonial power in 1904–08. Such reference is connected to longer term processes of communal resilience and coalescence that formed a vital and arguably the central part of the survivors' quest to reassemble their lives after the catastrophe of the genocide.

Given the fluidity of the events observed, the following accounts can present no more than snapshots. Still, they document both the long-term preoccupation of communities with the genocide and the ways in which these concerns and the claims that flow from

3 This is in contradistinction to the way nationalists in Europe and particularly in Germany tended to supplant religion by nationalism; see, with special reference to Fichte's 'theology of the nation', König 2008: 455–61, as quoted on p. 457.

4 For divergent views, see A. Assmann 1999; J. Assmann 1992; more recently König 2008: 94–124, who all focus on scriptural, canonic texts; Connerton 2002 takes a much broader view. The reference to the founder of sociological memory debate, Maurice Halbwachs (1997, 1994) cannot be followed up here.

them are projected to a wider audience, using the means available to them.⁵ The rehearsal of historical events forms an important and even central, but by no means the only, dimension of communal festivals. As indicated, reproducing the communal nexus by meeting and mingling, also includes various forms of enjoyment. These vary widely across the events. As will be seen, Heroes Day in Gibeon in particular includes references to various aspects of present-day life of the community.

FOUR COMMEMORATIONS

Most of the annual events observed in central and southern Namibia take their cues from the history of the Namibian War. By taking up dates that relate to the specific experience of a local group, this history is commemorated and presented as something much more relevant than a distant chain of occurrences. This circumstance is obviously closely related to the importance which large parts of the various communities still attach to the Namibian War as part of their living memory. At the same time, that memory is obviously also reproduced by the commemorations as large and salient communal affairs. In the following sketches, I attempt to give some idea about the ways such memory is rehearsed and projected. These accounts also refer to the ways and means that claims and concerns related to the colonial past are articulated and projected by memory practice. Where possible, I also explore the background of each festival and the ways it has changed over time. In this way, the events are placed within a trajectory of communal reconstruction.

The four commemorations to be discussed in this section have been researched before quite unevenly, and the availability of sources on their background also differs clearly. Apart from variety, the commemorations detailed here have been chosen on account of opportunities for personal, participant observation which forms the central and main source material on which my accounts are based.

Herero Day, Okahandja

Herero Day, observed in late August at Okahandja, is arguably the best known communal commemoration in Namibia. It is also the oldest annual commemoration within central and southern Namibia. As such, it may be considered a template for other similar events, at least as far as they are observed by Ovaherero communities. Moreover, the origin of this festival itself marks a watershed in the trajectory of anti-colonial resistance by Namibians and also in their relationship to South Africa as the incumbent colonial power. The event does not directly refer to the genocide itself, but to the first, rather spectacular demonstration of the reconstruction of an Ovaherero 'nation'. However, Herero Day cannot be separated

⁵ This approach clearly differs from the observations by Memory Biwa (2012: ch. 4) who highlights memorial practice specifically in Nama communities. I see these approaches as complementing each other.

from the Namibian War, precisely because it marks a decisive stage of collective grappling with its aftermath. Furthermore, the event refers to Samuel Maharero as the leader of Ovaherero during the war. More than 90 years after its inauguration, this commemoration remains highly charged politically, as also testified by recent developments and conflicts. It is therefore important to review some of this trajectory before considering the current forms in which the commemoration is held.

The original occasion was marked by the re-burial of Samuel Maharero on 26 October 1923 at the chiefly gravesite of the Tjamuaha-Maharero house in Okahandja. About half a year before the burial, the exiled paramount chief had passed on in Bechuanaland (today's Botswana), where he, along with a small group of followers, had been received by the Ngwato leadership.⁶ Right after his death, efforts set in to arrange for a transfer of Samuel Maharero's remains to his traditional capital of Okahandja. This plan required rather elaborate arrangements and negotiations. At various stages, participants on the side of Ovaherero were in particular Samuel Maharero's heir apparent, Friedrich Maharero, and Chief Hosea Kutako, whom the Paramount had nominated as his caretaker in Namibia. Their counterparts were the South African administration, some missionaries, and the white municipality of Okahandja. All of these individual and institutional actors were to figure prominently in the trajectory that followed as the event became set practice during the ensuing period.

In 1923, the burial of Samuel Maharero was significant for three main reasons: The symbolic return of the Paramount helped to re-centre the formerly dispersed Ovaherero groups, to constitute them as a 'nation'. This experience also gave a strong push to once again take up traditional practices. These practices included, above all, male circumcision, along with the associated solidarity of age classes, and the holy fire, *okuruwo* (Sundermeier 1973: 91). Another vector towards cohesion may be seen in the massive collections of money and also provision of cattle that were necessary for the occasion (Krüger 1999: 204). Obviously, this effort meant much more than amassing needed resources. Such an exertion also reinforces existing bonds between contributing groups and individuals. By the massive turnout of two to three thousand people,⁷ the event also testified to the visible re-emergence of Ovaherero as a more or less coherent community. Participants displayed 'red scarves or bands as traditional symbols', and there were '150 men on horseback, a line of 800 men and a band'. In this line up, Ngavirue (1997: 193) sees 'a symbolic resurrection of the Herero army in the eclectic style which it had adopted before the risings of 1904 to 1907'. In this way, the mourners not only displayed clear ethnic markers and demonstrated an identity and an organisational structure that was recognised by the administration at least on an informal basis, they also laid claim to a connection with the pre-colonial past as well as with armed anti-colonial resistance. This community structure was also evidently

6 For the following, see Gewald 1999: 275–84; Krüger 1999: 203–16; Ngavirue 1997: 192–5.

7 The literature gives diverse numbers: Ngavirue 1997: 193 has '3,000 Hereros and 100 Europeans'; Gewald 1999: 279 'no less than 2,500 uniformed Herero men ... and an unspecified amount of Herero women'; Krüger 1999: 205 mentions '1,600 people' who received the coffin at the railway station.



FIG. 8.1 Burial of Samuel Maharero, August 26, 1923. Photograph: *Basler Afrika Bibliographien, Fritz und Jan Gaerdes Sammlung.*

independent of both the mission church and of the Marcus Garvey Movement which had been so influential only shortly before (Gewald 2000a: 149–56).

In remarkable ways, the event of 26 August 1923 demonstrated the newly found community spirit that existed among Ovaherero. Such spirit is apparent in the organisational feat of bringing such a large number of mourners to Okahandja, of mobilising them and of marshalling the entire ritual (Gewald 1999: 278–9). Still, in important ways, the ceremony was also mediated by the presence and intervention of white officialdom and of the missionaries. The latter were deeply irritated by their congregation's behaviour from the very moment Samuel Maharero's passing on was made known during a church service. After the announcement, everybody in the crowd, clad in black, remained in absolute silence (Krüger 1999: 204). This irritation among the missionaries persisted on account of what they considered and abhorred as 'heathen' practices. In the missionaries' view, such practices dominated the burial rites (Sundermeier 1973: 91). In any case, the church service, conducted by Heinrich Vedder, was clearly separate from the following ceremony outside the church building.

This ceremony took its cue, 'in its outward appearances', from funerals of high-ranking German military, but at the same time, it took place 'strictly according to Herero custom' (Gewald 1999: 280). The ritual included a visit to the site of Samuel Maharero's former

house and in particular, an elaborate and solemn announcement to make the arrival of the dead chief known to the ancestors. In this way, the coffin, draped in the Union Jack, was entombed at the grave. Significantly, this ceremony was followed by the speech of the administrator, which in the administrator's absence, was delivered by the Secretary for SWAA and Chief Native Commissioner, F. P. Courtney-Clarke. Besides Courtney-Clarke, a Native Affairs Officer and the Magistrate of Okahandja also attended (Gewald 1999: 279, 281). In this way, white officialdom figured prominently during the proceedings. What is more, colonial officials also showed themselves firmly in control of the overall situation: It had been incumbent on them to render permission for the reburial ritual in the first place, and they also saw no difficulty in refusing Friedrich Maharero's request for conditions under which he might have been able to stay in his native land in a dignified form and as the heir of the deceased paramount chief.

By its set-up and circumstances, then, the entire elaborate ceremony attested to the ambivalence and ambiguity associated with any assertion of African collective identity under colonial rule. This was brought out graphically in the prolonged conflict over the Maharero chiefly gravesite itself.

In Ovaherero culture, chiefly graves have been associated first and foremost with the marking of territorial claims. The fight that evolved during the 1920s to secure the various important gravesites in Okahandja against the pretensions of the white municipality, and to an extent, also the missionary society, was therefore of strategic importance (Krüger 1999: 71–90). At the burial itself, 'through the ceremonial occupation of Okahandja, the uniformed troops symbolised and demonstrated the vision of a united people, reinforcing their claim to ancestral land' (Krüger & Henrichsen 1998: 159). The turn-out *en masse* of uniformed men, the *oturupa*, as one of the central symbols of Ovaherero collective identity as it had evolved after the catastrophe of 1904, was closely linked to this historical claim to central Okahandja. This claim concerned in particular the gravesites as proof of Ovaherero presence. Assertion of collective identity also hinged on the prominent role of horse riders (Ngavirue 1997: 193).

To this should be added the oral tradition already mentioned that traces the annual observance of this event from the admonishment of one of the *oturupa* 'Generals' at Samuel Maharero's funeral (Krüger & Henrichsen 1998: 158; Ngavirue 1997: 158). Ngavirue stresses the linkage that existed between the colour red, namely 'the symbols of Chief Maharero's people' on the one hand and the creation of the *otjiserandu*, the Red Band Organisation on the other. According to Ngavirue (1997: 193), this body was created specifically 'to take care of the arrangements for this occasion'.

This high-profile burial marked something like a first phase in an on-going struggle to safeguard the gravesites of Ovaherero chiefs and other important personages which are situated in the centre of what was then the white town of Okahandja. As it turned out, the re-appropriation or even 'reoccupation' of central sites in Okahandja remained precarious at best. As far as such re-appropriation went, it was itself deeply marked by colonial rule. The rights associated with the gravesites were contested by the municipality over a long period

of time. Significantly, it took special permission by Courtney-Clarke to make possible for a guard of honour to hold vigil at the fresh grave on the evening of Samuel Maharero's burial. This vigil extended beyond the usual curfew hours imposed on black people (Gewald 1999: 281–2).⁸

In further developments, an on-going, low-key conflict over Ovaherero claims involved the municipality and the missionary society. There had been a lingering conflict with the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMG), because some of the graves in the churchyard had been flattened down. These sites included the grave of Wilhelm Maharero, older brother of Samuel Maharero. This procedure was motivated by the claim of the RMG to be the owner of the graveyard and further claims that the graves had not been properly taken care of. Both claims were contradicted, first because the missionary society was blamed for illegitimate interference; secondly, and more importantly, an Ovaherero spokesperson claimed precedence of Ovaherero over all other inhabitants. This claim was based on the assertion that Ovaherero had been the first occupants of Okahandja, and thus had the strongest rights to the place. From first occupation flowed rights that were documented by the graves, and which therefore conveyed additional importance to these gravesites.

Some years after Samuel Maharero's burial, the municipality decided to go ahead with plans to create a park and a swimming pool in such a way that the chiefly graves would be surrounded by the park and adjacent to the swimming pool grounds. From this plan ensued a complex web of mutual fears of desecration. On the one hand, the municipality was afraid that Ovaherero visiting the graves might spoil the park or cause 'molestation etc. of the ladies using the swimming bath near the graves'.⁹ In this way, desecration of the graves was set off symbolically against the purity of white women. Similarly, the local missionary objected to the possibility of 'heathen' rites at the gravesides. Ovaherero, on the other hand, saw a serious impingement against their right to the historical symbolic centre of their group, which at the same time bore witness of their superior rights to occupation.

The solution reached after lengthy consultations between the central administration, the municipality and leading Ovaherero did not only restrict access to the graves for Ovaherero to 'a single day' every year (Krüger 1999: 281), but entailed further restrictions on a continuous basis. In its pronouncements, the administration articulated the fears that were connected with the annual parade of uniformed men and women. Permission had to be sought for every single occasion, that is every year over again. For years, the South African authorities granted this permission only on condition 'that no uniforms or red tabs are worn and . . . that no drilling is indulged in'.¹⁰ Such rules were severe infringements on central symbols of Ovaherero identity as they had evolved since 1904. Thus, an Ovaherero spokesman insisted on 'the request of Samuel Maharero personally, he said those who belong

8 Where not indicated otherwise, the following paragraph summarises Krüger 1999: 274–82.

9 NAN SWAA A 50/51 v1, Town Clerk (Okahandja) to Senior Officer Lands Branch, Windhoek, 12. 7. 1934.

10 NAN SWAA A 50/51 v1, Administrator/Chief Native Commissioner to Magistrate/Native Commissioner Okahandja, 29.7.1941; this file contains numerous similar regulations for other years. Note the much more lenient approach taken by the colonial authorities to military style practices of German speakers (see ch. 4).

to him shall be those who will bury him in uniforms in the form of troop' which had been followed at subsequent occasions.¹¹

During the heyday of Apartheid in the early 1950s, the municipality made another attempt to get rid of the graves. This time, concern was ostensibly with the purity of water that was drawn from the adjacent Okahandja river. The ban against further burials in the chiefly grave was lifted only in the 1990s, after Namibian independence (Gewald 1999: 283).

From its inception, Herero Day reflected both the tradition and claims of the Tjamuaha-Maharero house at its traditional centre in Okahandja and appealed to a wider Ovaherero identity at the same time. This was reinforced by linking the visit to the Tjamuaha-Maharero grave to that of Kahimemua Nguvauva, the Mbanderu Chief who had been executed as a rebel in 1896 (Gewald 1999: 107–10). In this way, Ovambanderu could be integrated into the commemoration, even though this group asserted their distinct identity, among other ways by adopting their own flag; only in 1947 was a separate commemoration started, Nikodemus Day at Okaseta, which refers to the burial of Nikodemus Kavikunua after his execution in 1896 along with Kahimemua (Sundermeier 1977: 131; Gewald 1998: 133–8). This notwithstanding, the visit to Kahimemua's grave was obviously continued for an extended period of time. Thus, a lengthy account of Herero Day in 1960¹² relates the usual route taken from the Kommando building, first to the 'Rhenish Church (for Africans)' where a service was held, after which the adjacent graveyard was visited. As noted in the report, German soldiers who died in 1904 and 1905 are buried here, and also the 'Herero chiefs Willem Maharero, Rijuaria Ruhumba, Nikodemus Kavikunua and his son Hosea Kavikuna, Kavezeri Tjamuaha and Traugoth [sic] Maharero'. The usual route continued to the 'graves of the Mahareros in whose honour the day is celebrated' and then to the grave of Kahimemua. The incisive change noted in this account concerned the 'boycott' of the church service as a consequence of sharpened conflict between the Rhenish Mission church and the Oruano Church that had split from the mission in 1955. This meant that 'the people were forced to abandon a church which was built by their own chiefs'.¹³ A further feature noted in this report and not observed later was the participation of 'Nama trumpeters of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Windhoek'. Such cross-communal features still are exceptions;¹⁴ the visit to Kahimemua's grave seems since to have been discontinued.

Even though the ceremony of Herero Day has long not been questioned, even today it conveys some of its original thrust on spatial claims and re-occupation. Thus, the festive procession still moves from the Ovaherero Kommando, which is situated in the former township, into the centre of the town to visit the graves. The other parts of the commemoration take place at the Kommando. After having been welcomed ceremoniously

11 NAN SWAA A 50/59, Translation of Letter "A", dated Windhoek, 15.8.1938; transl. by Fritz Kasuto, Interpreter Native Languages.

12 The following refers to *South West News/Suidwes Nuus*, 3.9.1960 (see Henrichsen 1997).

13 During the commemoration of 2005, with a large contingent of participants from the Oruano Church on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the late Bishop Asaria Kamburona ceremoniously knocked at the locked door of the church (personal observation).

14 But see the report on the commemoration in Swakopmund in March 2014, at the close of ch. 12.



Fig. 8.2 Announcing the visit to the ancestors, Okahandja, Herero Day 2005. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

by the paramount chief at the Kommando, on the morning of the festive day, a solemn procession, complete with flags and horse riders, men in the front and women at the back, both in more or less loose formation, arrives in the vicinity of the graves in what today is named Heroes Street. Riders dismount, and the crowd moves along a path to the chiefly graves, some 100 metres off the road. A senior representative of the Maharero family, a ritual specialist, announces the visitors to the ancestors. After this solemn ceremony, the people move past the graves, symbolically touching the encircling wall. The same procedure is repeated at a further group of graves, most prominently those of the paramount chiefs, Hosea Kutako and Clemens Kapuuo, and since his decease and burial in 2014, also Kuaima Riruako. These gravesites are immediately adjacent to the grave of Jonker Afrikaner, the Oorlam chieftain who in the mid-19th Century ruled his proto-state from Okahandja. The procession finally reaches the graveyard mentioned before, which is at the back of the old mission church where further eminent Ovaherero are buried. On their way back out of the churchyard, some people also touch some crosses in the adjacent German war cemetery. For many years, the event also presented as a tourist attraction,¹⁵ has been regularly observed by tourists arriving in a few buses from Windhoek.

Back at the Kommando site, complete with national and ethnic flags as well as with the holy fire so central to Ovaherero ritual, the afternoon is taken up mainly by speeches, with interspersed choir performances. This rather terse set-up, in comparison, for example, to Heroes Day in Gibeon, may be seen as underlining the high political profile the event has commanded during recent years. Herero Day makes a twofold reference to current national politics. On the one hand, the date regularly clashes with the national Heroes Day on August 26, to commemorate the first armed engagement of the liberation war in 1966. The official celebrations rotate among the 14 regions of the country, and in several instances, the entire

¹⁵ For instance in the in-flight magazine *Flamingo* of Air Namibia, December 2001.



Fig. 8.3 Paying respects to German war graves, Okahandja, Herero Day 2005. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

cabinet has been seen travelling huge distances across the country. This does not leave much room for any official recognition of Herero Day.

Moreover, this is linked to the second dimension of the politics of that event: For many years now, speeches have been marked to a large extent by references to the on-going campaign, led by the late Ovaherero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako, for adequate German apology and compensation for the genocide. As long as the Namibian Government tended to shun this issue,¹⁶ attendance seemed ill-advised from their point of view. In the Herero Day speeches, emphasis on the reparation issue came to the fore, for example in 2005 with the appearance of South African Attorney Jeremy Sarkin, who briefed listeners on the position about pending lawsuits in the United States, and even more one year later, with the speech by the Left Party Deputy in the German Bundestag, Hüseyin Aydın. These interventions highlighted the linkage that had formed between Ovaherero identity and the genocide issue. This linkage had been enhanced especially on the occasion of the centenary in 2004. In that year, the commemoration of the battle of Ohamakarri served as an occasion to give the issue high public profile, including the apology by the German Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development (cf. Kössler 2006: 50–66 and ch. 11).

The underlying sentiments about apology and reparation were brought forward at Herero Day 2005 by a picture display that summarised key events from Ovaherero history and in

¹⁶ To a certain extent, this has changed since late 2006; see below, chs 11 & 12.

particular of the year 1904. This display had been adapted from the exhibition shown at the Ovaherero Kommando in Katutura a year earlier (see ch. 1). The tent in which the display was shown carried a huge banner with this inscription:

German occupation we resisted for freedom
The resisters lost cattle and land
Extermination we survived
We share the torch we carried and transmitted in reconciliation.

This text highlighted the persistence of bereavement and trauma in the wake of genocide. At the same time, the text pointed clearly to the reconstruction of Ovaherero communal nexuses from which Herero Day takes its central cue. Finally, these two motives are linked to the overarching watchword of reconciliation that, however ill defined, has shaped Namibian politics since independence in decisive ways. Thus, these motives also point back to the unheeded obligation that today still devolves on the German state as a consequence of the genocide. Herero Day is one of the important public venues in Namibia where this concern is articulated.

The tension that exists in relation to the reparations issue can be gauged from Hüseyin Aydın's speech at Herero Day in 2006 when he stated:

Genocide does not lapse, neither morally nor legally. . . . To recognise the demand for reparation for the genocide in German Southwest Africa is an integral element of coming to terms with the past. And it is a precondition for the struggle for a better world.¹⁷

Herero Day has become, therefore, an important and even central venue for Namibian memory politics, in particular concerning German colonial rule and the genocide. However, this development has not obliterated the other dimensions and meanings the event has carried or acquired over the decades. At its heart is the ritual of visiting and commemorating the dead, in particular Ovaherero chiefs. Thereby, an assertion of claims to space is linked to the rehearsal of history. Even by the spatial set-up and dislocation of the chiefly graves, some of the inherent tensions become apparent: The gravesite of the Tjamuaha-Maharero dynasty is clearly set off from the graves of the paramount chiefs, which moreover are situated in the direct vicinity of the grave of Jonker Afrikaner. To these must be added the graves of eminent persons in the cemetery across the road and the grave of Kahimemua, which for some time was included in the visiting schedule. All these different sites carry symbolic meanings, connected with past as well as current conflicts.

17 Hüseyin Aydın, MdB, Rede am Herero-Tag in Okahandja (Namibia), 27. August 2006; http://www.hueseyin-aydin.de/article/87.die_herero_und_nama_haben_ein_anrecht_auf_reparationen.html (accessed 30.7.2007)

In terms of ritual, the current tensions and conflicts over the jurisdiction and legitimacy of the Royal Houses and the paramount chief can somehow be managed and channelled through the consecutive visit to the graves that carry their particular meanings.¹⁸ Besides, this event is staged as a colourful procession that also attracts tourist attention, given the relatively small distance of the site from Windhoek, on the road to Waterberg and Etosha. This constellation has also formed the basis on which an agenda of apology and reparation vis-à-vis Germany could be articulated for many years – less through the parade at the gravesites than through the speeches and also special guests at the Kommando, which is much less in view of the casual visitor.

From this perspective, both Heroes Day in Gibeon and Herero Day in Okahandja carry a common message. Reconciliation, among the various groups and tendencies in Namibia and between the posterity of the survivors of genocide and the German state as the official representative of the German nation, is predicated on the clear recognition of what has happened and on the sincere determination to seek whatever redress is possible for the atrocities and injustices of the past.

Omaruru: tradition with a political message¹⁹

White Flag Day or Zeraeua Day was instituted shortly after the burial of Samuel Maharero and the inception of Herero Day. According to information given at the 2007 event, it was first observed in 1927.²⁰ Whereas Herero Day in Okahandja quickly became a central event for the various Ovaherero groups, White Flag leaders apparently saw a need to assert the specific identity of their own group with their own distinctive flag in black and white. Such sentiments reflected longer standing conflicts and rivalries that date back to the 19th Century. In this way, Zeraeua Day clearly goes back to communal reconstruction of the 1920s, as well as to the earlier division among Ovaherero at the time of their settlement in central Namibia (Sundermeier 1977: 127–9). However, Zeraeua day takes its historical reference not directly from the Namibian War, but from the mainstay of White Flag identity construction. The event commemorates Chief Wilhelm Zeraeua. While still residing in Otjimbingwe, Zeraeua was instrumental in supplying Ovaherero, first with fire arms during the early stages of active resistance against the Afrikaner Oorlam hegemony in central Namibia; later, Chief Zeraeua moved to Omaruru, which in the 1870s became a commercial hub (Henrichsen 2011: 128–38; Gewald 1999: 20–4).

18 The conflict between Riruako followers and Maharero followers that culminated in a police ban to hold Herero Day in 2012 revolved around the location of the holy fire at the Kommando site and seemed thus not directly linked to Herero Day. For conflict over jurisdiction at the Kommando in Okahandja, see also the occurrence mentioned in the following subsection.

19 I was able to observe this event on October 7, 2007 and again on October 5, 2008; thanks to Senior Councillor Rudolf Hongoze for introducing me and providing vital information, and to Jean Fischer, Omaruru, for hospitality in 2007; to Ida Hoffmann, Malte Jaguttis and Dierk Schmidt for company in 2008.

20 Sundermeier 1977: 131 states that Zeraeua Day commenced in 1924.

The White Flag sets itself off symbolically from the red used by Ovaherero residing around Okahandja or Waterberg by the white colour which is displayed in the flag of the community, on women's dresses, as well as on tabs and badges on men's uniforms, along with black, often in the form of small dots. In terms of more current politics, the close association of the Zeraeua House – as of the six Ovaherero Royal Houses generally – with the ruling party SWAPO is well-known. However, this bond was not conspicuous in the 2007 and 2008 events. Here, there is a stark contrast to the situation at Okahandja. In that town, the tension between the claims of late Ovaherero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako who also headed the small NUDO party and the Maharero family was obvious and occasionally could flare up into open confrontation.²¹ However, at the 2007 event in Omaruru, rivalry over the legitimacy of traditional leaders, along with its party political overtones, found expression in a different and quite unusual way.

This time, White Flag Day occupied a central position within the highly symbolic visit of a group of quite distant relatives of General Lothar von Trotha, the main perpetrator of the genocide more than a hundred years earlier. The Trothas' participation in the event was an obvious highlight. At the same time, this feature raised serious controversy. Obviously, the Trotha presence motivated the arrival of Cabinet Ministers as well as the presence of the German Ambassador. In this way, it added unusual profile and visibility to the commemoration in Omaruru. Under such circumstances, the coincidence between the visit, much-publicised in Namibia, and the Omaruru event clearly also played a role in the on-going power struggle between different claimants for traditional leadership amongst Ovaherero. Paramount Chief Riruako used the occasion of a commemorative event in South Africa shortly before the Trotha group was due in Namibia to openly warn the Trotha family members that they should bring their own bodyguards if they dared to enter Namibia. He claimed the ancestors would not like the visit. This motivated heavy police protection throughout the duration of the Trothas' visit.²²

Less than a week after the Omaruru event, an intended ceremony, to be led by the late Supreme Chief Alfons Maharero to see the Trotha group off for their return to Germany, could not be held as planned at the Ovaherero Kommando in Okahandja, which forms the centre of the resident Ovaherero community. The venue had been occupied and sealed off by Riruako supporters. In this way, the Supreme Chief was barred from access, and the ceremony had to be held in central Okahandja, in the vicinity of the chiefly graves.²³ The

21 Under Riruako's successor, Vekuui Rukoro, not much seems to have changed in this respect.

22 TN 1.10.2007; own observation and informal talks with members of the Trotha group, who claimed they had been quite unaware of the implications and were shocked by the repercussions of their visit. As stated by members of the group, most recent genealogical links with Lothar von Trotha go back to the early 18th Century. From the account in Schilling 2014: 186–94, based on interviews with family members conducted before their visit, in April 2007 (when the visit must already have been scheduled), little is reflected of the drama that was experienced by the visitors, although the general circumstances are mentioned. However, we are informed that besides Lothar von Trotha's well known son Thilo, killed during the Nama–German War, three further Trothas served 'in the Schutztruppe between 1904 and 1906', and two more distant relatives came to GSWA as farmers (Schilling 2014: 187).

23 Personal observation, Okahandja, October 13, 2007; thanks to Johanna Kahajipara for decisive assistance.

major public event of the Trotha visit to Namibia, in all its ambiguities and fraught with contradictions, was thus integrated into White Flag Day.

In a manner similar to that of the bigger event in Okahandja, the core ritual revolves around the visit to the graves of chiefs and other dignitaries. On account of this, a similar spatial pattern also prevails. The old graveyard, which in 2007 was the first place of call for the procession, and where the entire event terminated in 2008, is a multinational burial site; it is claimed that persons from eleven different nations are buried there. Besides the chiefly graves, this cemetery contains an open space indicated to the visitor as an unmarked mass grave, dating from the Namibian War. The cemetery is no longer in use.²⁴ This important memorial site is in the centre of the town, formerly a white preserve. In this way, the leitmotif of re-appropriation is also present in the visiting of the gravesites. In 2007, another graveyard on the outskirts of the centre and on the far side of the Omaruru River was also visited. The procession covers the spatial distances between these sites and the township of Ozondje, where most local Ovaherero reside. As in Okahandja, this spatial and residential arrangement forms one of the obvious heritages of colonialism and Apartheid. The township is set off from the neat central town by the rugged and broad bed of the Omaruru River. The crossing of the river bridge may be seen as a symbolic passage from one sphere to the other. At the same time, the buildings of the former mission church and the cemetery clearly mark the present town centre as a vital space of the local Ovaherero community, even though in colonial times it had been reserved for whites, while Africans were restricted to the township. The river still constitutes a clearly visible separation between these two spheres. The postcolonial set-up is further marked by the locally celebrated Franke Tower, situated outside the present town centre on the far side of the river, but also at a considerable distance from the township. This monument was built in honour of Captain Viktor Franke, whose detachment was instrumental in 1904 in lifting the siege by Ovaherero on the German garrison. Moreover, the tower was built on the site of chief Zeraeua's holy fire²⁵ and also in this way carries a strong statement of colonial presence and of the effort to obliterate African autonomy.

The place of assembly for the procession to the cemeteries is the vast open space around the Ovaherero Kommando, a modest, white-washed building, sporting the insignia of the Zeraeua clan. For the occasion, the flags (with the white, red and green bands) of the three Ovaherero divisions are flown. In 2007, there was also a speakers' platform as well as a large tent to provide shade for listeners during the speeches, and some chairs, whereas at comparable events, many people bring their own collapsible chairs, and many sit in the scorching sun. The commemoration is generally held on a Sunday.²⁶ In 2007, many participants arrived rather informally during the previous Saturday, often from Windhoek or the coastal towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. These towns are within fairly easy reach,

24 See *Omaruru Town Profile*, Omaruru: The Municipality of Omaruru, n.d. [2007]: 7; personal communication, Rudolf Hongoze, Omaruru, April 29, 2007.

25 Personal communication, Rudolf Hongoze, Omaruru, April 29, 2007.

26 In 2007, I could observe from Saturday to Sunday, while in 2008, I could observe only on Sunday.



Fig. 8.4 Group of *oturupa* with White Flag, Omaruru, October 2007. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

and many people from Omaruru find employment here. As noted, such a coming together of long-term migrants and urbanites who still preserve ties to the traditional centre is an important feature of all communal events in Namibia. In this way, the celebrations, along with burials spread over the year, serve as opportunities for reunion and for re-affirming one's roots. On Saturday, visitors were received at the Kommando, where preliminary informal meetings and discussions had taken place; there were also rehearsals of small groups of *oturupa*. Visitors who did not stay with friends and relatives camped around the open space in front of the Kommando, also the festival site for the occasion. Two sides border the open *veld*, while the other two are adjacent to the township.

The official schedule was announced to commence at 6 a.m., shortly before sunrise on Sunday. However, nobody ventured into the chilly morning,²⁷ and things got under way at a leisurely pace. As people arrived, they began to assemble, and particularly the *oturupa* groups formed and started marching practice. In the beginning, they marched back and forth on the large open space in front of the Kommando. As time progressed, marching was done in more complex evolutions that marked cooperation between different detachments. These exercises were repeated later at various points along the journey of some 5 km towards the town centre.

27 In other words, the researcher found himself alone for a while.



Fig. 8.5 Monument for Michael Tjiseseta after unveiling, Omaruru, October 2008. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

The main road is reached shortly before it crosses the Omaruru River. Right after the large bridge, the road bends sharply to the right. In 2007, the procession was joined at this spot by the Trotha group, who took their place at the head, right behind a small group of dignitaries who marched behind the national flag of Namibia. The *oturupa*, with the three Ovaherero banners in front, followed this group, and both were flanked by horse riders. Then the uniformed men and women followed, also in traditional dress and marching in formation. These were again followed by a small group of Ovahimba women, who belonged to a delegation who had travelled all the way from the Kaokoveld (in Kunene Region) some 600 km to the north-west, as well as by small delegations of women clad in the red or green dresses of the Red Flag and the Ovambanderu. The procession then continued to the historical cemetery.

At the gate of the cemetery, the procession was joined by a group of Protestant pastors who emerged from the old mission church next to the entrance of the graveyard. Before the procession could enter the cemetery, the visitors had to be formally announced to the ancestors by a senior descendant, who alone is entitled to do so. Participants knelt in front of the gate while this ritual was performed. After this ceremonial announcement, the procession filed to the main gravesite of the Omaruru chiefs, situated at the far end of the rectangular cemetery. Here, all the participants arranged themselves around the extended gravesite for a commemoration led by the pastors.

During the 2007 ceremony, the religious service was followed by a ritual departure, when the chiefs, followed by the Trotha family members, filed past the graves, touching the grave

stones in ritual acknowledgement of the ancestors. This was repeated on their way out of the cemetery, when they also passed and acknowledged the separate grave of Michael Tjiseseta, the chief at the time of the Herero–German War who had fled to Walvis Bay and gone on to South Africa, and whose remains were repatriated in 2004. At that time, this grave was still marked by a simple wooden cross and covered by a palm leaf. The 2008 event highlighted the ceremonious unveiling of a tombstone in the shape of a cartridge as well as a solid cover of polished stone over the grave with inscriptions in Otjiherero and English, informing viewers of Michael Tjiseseta's life and deeds as well as commemorating the fallen warriors. Along with the completely unmarked mass grave where plans for a dignified setting were aired,²⁸ this can be read as a partial re-appropriation still in progress.

During the ceremony at the cemetery in 2007, horse riders stood in attendance around its outer wall. The presence of these riders testified to the current situation of partial and precarious re-appropriation of central Omaruru, as the ritually desired possibility of circling the cemetery by horse riders hinges on the property rights of one adjacent plot which the Zeraeua group hoped to acquire.²⁹

In 2008, in a much less elaborate version of the commemoration, the gravesite was also the place where speeches were held, which lasted long into the afternoon. In 2007, however, the procession resumed from the old cemetery. It passed through the dry Omaruru river bed and reached a second cemetery, situated outside of town. Here, the graves of an array of *oturupa* pioneers and other outstanding members of the community were honoured in much the same way as before, but without participation of the pastors, while speeches were given in remembrance of the dead. A particular highlight was the unveiling of a new tombstone. The procession then returned to the Kommando, for the most part on foot, while some of the dignitaries, the elderly and the Trotha group travelled in cars.

In 2007, the second part of the day's proceedings followed at the space prepared near the Kommando. Apart from a brief cultural performance by Ovahimba women, this mainly comprised speeches by local and other Ovaherero dignitaries, cabinet ministers, the chairman of the Trotha family association, and the German Ambassador. The latter two speakers, as well as the contents of the speeches, clearly marked this event as a special occasion. Significantly, Ovaherero speakers stressed their expectation for the Trothas to plead their case with high-ranking German authorities, including the Chancellor. On the other hand, the Trotha speech pointed out, apart from their regret for what had happened a century earlier, their genealogical distance from the imperial general and the private capacity in which they had come to Namibia (see also Kössler 2007b). Besides listening to the speeches, the crowd engaged in conversation and socialising, braving the scorching October heat. As the afternoon wore on, time began to run out for those who still had to make their way to Windhoek or to the coast.

Overall, this ceremony clearly links commemoration of the dead leaders and their exploits with communal self-representation and reproduction. The long procession marks a visible re-appropriation of the central part of Omaruru, which still bears the hallmarks of settler

28 Personal communication, Rudolf Hongoze, Omaruru, April 29, 2007.

29 Personal communication, Rudolf Hongoze, Omaruru, April 29, 2007.



Fig. 8.6 Group of visiting members of Trotha family, having joined the procession, Omaruru, October 2007. The Trotha family follow immediately behind a group of dignitaries carrying the Namibian flag. Note police guard behind the group, who are followed by the ordinary procession, headed by the three Herero banners. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

colonialism, even though today the main road is named after Wilhelm Zeraeua, and better off Ovaherero have long moved into houses in these parts. Along with this, there was a message in the speeches which to a certain extent extolled tradition but much more pointedly dealt with issues of current importance. In the particular conjuncture of 2007, this meant the Ovaherero claim for adequate recognition of the genocide by the German Government, along with the obligation for reparations for damage done. The Trotha visit was clearly seen as a vehicle to advance this cause, and at the same time, gain some ground with regard to the rivalry between the six Royal Houses on the one side and the paramount chief on the other. This rivalry, which pertains obviously to the loyalty of the followers of both sides, has in recent years been played out to a considerable extent in terms of activities around the reparations issue.³⁰

Gibeon: communal identity and the image of the nation

The annual event colloquially still known as *Witbooi fees*, or Witbooi Festival,³¹ usually but not always is staged in Gibeon in southern Namibia and commemorates the decease of the legendary *Kaptein* (*Gaob*) Hendrik Witbooi, who at an advanced age was killed in action during the Nama–German War, on October 29, 1905. The figure of Hendrik Witbooi combines the qualities of a linchpin for communal identification, and of a national hero of independent Namibia. This is motivated by his clairvoyant pronouncements against the

³⁰ This will be taken up at various points in the following chapters.

³¹ Biwa 2012: 175 gives the Nama term, '*Khowsen Goa-aob Hendrik Witbooi di//o-tses di #ei-#eisens di Tses*', with obvious reference to the *Kaptein* (*gaob*).

build-up of colonial rule during the early 1890s and by his dogged, anti-colonial resistance. The two dimensions coalesce in the projection of the national standing of the Witbooi group and its leadership, expressed not least by the staging of this festival.

Early stages of the festival

Even though it has been claimed that the first commemoration took place in 1906 to commemorate the first anniversary of Hendrik Witbooi's death,³² the first report of a comparable ritual may be traced back to 1930. In that year, the visiting inspector of the Rhenish Missionary Society, Johannes Olpp, reported a memorial service for chiefs which was conducted at the cemetery, under the auspices of the resident magistrate, at that time still based at Gibeon, and also of the resident Rhenish missionary. Olpp's account conveys the blending of official control and benevolence with the reproduction of a still precarious communal nexus:

How disciplined and well-ordered things are amongst the Witboois, I had occasion to observe at a national celebration, which by accident took place on the day after my arrival and was held under the initiative and direction of the magistrate (=Bezirkshauptmann). Namely, on the grave site of Isaak Witbooi, deceased in the preceding year, a memorial stone was to be unveiled for Isaak and jointly for his great father.³³ For this celebration, the magistrate had invited all the Witboois still living in the country, and they showed up, so-to-speak to the last man, even from Windhoek by motor car. Gladly, the magistrate had granted them . . . to wear their old ensign, the white cloth, wound around the hat and ending on top in a bold knot and tag. On Sunday, . . . at one stroke, there appeared on top of the adjacent hill a long and solemn procession, the white-hats in front, followed by the women and children. Silently, as though on parade, the crowd took their stands near the memorial, then the brass choir opened the function, which the Witboois apparently saw as a funeral rite, with the hymn, 'All humans are destined to die' (*Alle Menschen müssen sterben*). On the behest of the magistrate, missionary Spellmeyer offered a prayer, and then the magistrate took over for a lengthy allocution which was conveyed by interpreter, covering the historical development of the Witbooi tribe up to this hour, reminding them that the Witboois had to thank for that what they had become, in the first place the Rhenish Mission. After I had also complied with the magistrate's wish and had related . . . some personal remembrances,³⁴ the impressive

32 E. du Pisani 1976b: 42; I cannot engage here fully the partly divergent account in Biwa 2012, but the date of 1906 for the first commemoration (Zondagh 1991: 165) is dubious, given the constraints of deportation and imprisonment IKhowsen underwent at that time.

33 Hendrik Witbooi was killed in action on October 29, 1905, on the farm of Vaalgras in southern Namibia; his gravesite remains unknown.

34 Olpp had been partly raised in Gibeon where his father had been stationed as a missionary. He was fluent in Nama.

function was closed by hymns and the chorale 'Jesus, in Thee I Trust' (*Jesu, meine Zuversicht*). Without a doubt, this day has once more strongly resuscitated the feeling of belonging together amongst the tribe. (Olpp 1930: 140–1).

Significantly, a main feature was the procession of Witbooi, described as extremely disciplined and orderly, from the reserve immediately adjacent to the northern border of the white town, to the cemetery, which is situated in what at that time was Gibeon townlands. This clearly dovetails with the idea of re-appropriation of the traditional capital which, in similar ways as in Okahandja and Omaruru, had been turned into a settler-dominated administrative and commercial centre. A further obvious feature in Olpp's account is the central agency accorded to the magistrate and the missionary. This is reminiscent of the situation at Samuel Maharero's burial where both officialdom and missionaries in the person of Heinrich Vedder also took prominent roles. However, the paternalistic posturing is still more evident in Olpp's account.³⁵ This attitude expresses real power relations. The role of officialdom seems to have been essential for the staging of the exercise. In any case, the procession and the religious service at the graves remain central features of the event even in its later, much changed and more elaborate versions.³⁶

In the case of Gibeon, local conditions have changed dramatically during the years since 1930. In 1931, the magistrate's seat was moved to Mariental and official presence in Gibeon was much reduced. Some thirty-five years later, Gibeon became the only white town that, in the course of implementation of the Odendaal Plan, was incorporated into one of the homelands, in this case Namaland. However, this move made the town even more fiercely contested terrain than before. Various Nama groups were resettled in the area and began to lay claim to Gibeon as a joint centre. Conflict involved mainly Bondelswarts, who had been removed from the southern fringe of Namibia, and Witbooi who still consider the town their traditional capital and exclusive rightful realm (cf. Kössler 2005b: 238–41).

This history is clearly reflected in the layout of Gibeon even today. The old centre of the town stands out by large empty spaces: This is the site of the old settlement of Witbooi from 1863 onwards, overlapping with the space once occupied by the white town with an open front toward the bed of the Fish River, which of course is dry through most of the year. Of this erstwhile colonial centre, only a few colonial-style buildings remain, with large empty spaces in between. On the soft slopes rising towards the north and on the adjacent plain, sprawling settled areas fall into what is still known today as the Witbooi and the Bondelswarts locations. Re-appropriation and assertion of traditional rights have gained

35 Discursive strategies resemble those later employed in the exchanges of missionary Spellmeyer with his disciples after the church split in 1946 (see Kössler 1999a, 2004d).

36 Biwa 2012: 175 refers to versions of the event during the 1930s on the basis of K.F.H. Budack, 'n *Volkekundige Studie van die Tses Reservaat (Distrik Keetmanshoop, Suidwes Afrika) met besonder verwysing na die geskiedenis en die inter-etniese verhouding van die bewoners*, MA thesis, University of Pretoria 1965, p. 76; a further 'resurgence' in the late 1970s would have to be dated earlier with reference to E. du Pisani 1976a, b.

in importance after whites by and large disappeared from the town. This spatial situation is also reflected in the festival.³⁷

Since the simple commemoration reported by Olpp in 1930, the festival has been worked into an elaborate pageant. An intermediate stage has been observed by Etienne du Pisani (1976 a, b) in 1973. Under the name of *Witbooifees* or *Kapteinsfees*, the event was meant not only to honour deceased *kapteins*, but also as ‘a ritual manifestation that the captaincy has been preserved up to this day’ (1976b: 42). Du Pisani also reports the concern ‘that the Witbooi wish to document their “difference” from the other groups in Gibeon’ (1976b: 52–3), that is, to draw clear lines at a time when conflict had raged for several years over the establishment of a separate Bondelswarts headman based in Gibeon. In addition to the grievance that captaincy was not recognised by the South African administration, immigration or removal of other Nama groups as a part of the homeland strategy had led to serious confrontations (cf. Kössler 2005b: 103–5; 225–47). In this way, the commemoration explicitly addressed the burning issues of the period.

During the early 1970s, the event was held on a Sunday. Preparatory activities included the whitewashing of the tombstones of the former *kapteins*. Moreover there was a need – not observed in 1973 – for horse riders to assemble one or two days prior to the event. These riders held a ‘symbolic battle’ between Witbooi and Germans (E. du Pisani 1976: 43). The evening before the celebrations was marked by a tour of horse riders around the settlement, including the police station, the Evangelical Lutheran church, the site of *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi’s former house and the fountain that had been discovered by his grandfather, Kido Witbooi. This tour covered vital symbolic spots, including the church, which in similar ways to the situation in Okahandja, was no longer available to the bulk of Witbooi after the church split in 1946, when they had joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In this way, the tour by the horse riders clearly marked central and contested spots in Gibeon.

The commemoration described by du Pisani³⁸ basically took place throughout Sunday. It began with the ringing of the bell at the AME church, which marked the procession from the Witbooi location to the cemetery. The procession was headed by four horse riders, after whom followed ‘the children, the school principal,³⁹ councillors, grown-up men and women’ (1976b: 46), most of them in formal dress with the men wearing the Witbooi hat. The colours of sashes worn by men over the chest were used to symbolise Witbooi as well as groups these had had dealings with in historical times. Green stood for Ovaherero, red for the Red Nation, but black for mourning.

37 In terms of personal observation, I refer to the events of 1995, 2005, 2007 and 2008. See also Kössler 2008b and 2005b: 248–58; for earlier related research, see especially E. du Pisani 1976 a, b. Thanks in particular to the late *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi (Jnr) for many discussions and warm welcomes, to Talita !Ui#nuses and her family for making me feel at home and for lasting friendship, to Junior Councillor Tamen Uinuseb for information and discussions, to André du Pisani, Cristiana Fiamingo and Michael Akuupa for companionship and collegiality.

38 For the following, see E. du Pisani 1976b: 46–50.

39 The late Hendrik Witbooi, who at that time also served as secretary to *Kaptein* Hendrik Samuel Witbooi and from 1978 onward became his successor.

At the cemetery, Hendrik Witbooi Jnr opened the gate to let the participants in,⁴⁰ and the four horse riders took positions at the edges of the cemetery. The commemoration then was held at the cemetery. One salient feature was a long rendering of the 'history of *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi', including a detailed account of the skirmish at Vaalgras when he had been hit by a bullet and died (E. du Pisani 1976b: 48). This was followed by a question and answer session about these historical happenings and a praise song played from a tape recorder. All this took place under a large tree, and after this, the participants reassembled at the memorial stone for the old *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi,⁴¹ while the horse riders circled the cemetery three times and then entered it to align behind the participants. All grown men were then requested to salute the memorial stone three times. Apparently, this gesture was taken from the usage of German soldiers. This ceremony was followed by another praise song read by Hendrik Witbooi Jnr and a benediction also by him, along with low-tone music. People then partly dispersed or formed another procession to go back to the location. Du Pisani reports that in 1973, the tombstone of Dawid Witbooi, who had ruled as *Kaptein* from 1928 to 1955, also was saluted.

In the evening, a mourning service was held at the AME church, which according to informants in particular included a ceremony in which candles were lit for each of the Witbooi *kapteins*, along with mentioning their traditional names, dates of birth, and names of their mothers. Later, the candles were extinguished, mentioning the dates of the respective *kapteins*' deaths.

An important feature was the element of mourning, in particular the black flag that was flown over the *kaptein*'s house until October 29, the anniversary of the old Hendrik Witbooi's death. As du Pisani (1976b: 53) observed, participants arrived from 'all corners of South West Africa'.

Embracing national politics

In the years following, the Witbooi traditional leadership, aligned with SWAPO since the mid-1970s, have made the commemoration into an even more elaborate event. This happened both to convey the history of the group and to address current political issues on a communal and on a national scale. Significantly, the event was renamed 'Heroes Day' in 1980 to underline its national reference and significance, over and above its importance for Witbooi. In this vein, alliance building was pushed forward, for instance with the participation of the Damara King Justus ǀGaroeb, in 1988 (TN 4.11.1988). On the other hand, Henning Melber (2003: 30) reports that at the event in 1989, during the heat of the Constituent Assembly elections, Hendrik Witbooi, who stood as a SWAPO candidate and was to become a Cabinet Minister, 'delivered his . . . message as part of the election campaign'. Melber also noted the absence of any outside participants.

40 In 2012 and on prior occasions, the present writer did not encounter a formal gate.

41 See Olpp 1930 quoted above, and *infra*.

In the form observed by the present writer, the event usually lasts from Friday shortly before sunset until Sunday around noon on a weekend close to the anniversary of Hendrik Witbooi's death on October 29, 1905. Over the years, the programme has seen considerable variations. In fact, continuous innovation was seen as a vital characteristic of the festival by its main architect in its present form, the late *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi (1934–2009). Without presenting something new, he did not consider the whole exercise would be worthwhile.⁴² Continuous innovation is also reflected in the annually changing motto, giving a specific thrust to each individual event. One can consider this an example for the strategic innovation of ritual, explicitly geared both to communal self-assertion as well as reproduction, and also to national politics.⁴³ In an even more emphatic sense than has been asserted for south-west China, *Witbooi fees* is a ritual 'composed out of separate parts', based on a blueprint but still 'recognisable' (Oppitz 2001: 73) in spite of innovation and variation.

In this way, we can make out clear differences between this event and those at Omaruru or Okahandja: These are much more pre-set in their programmes, even though it is possible to adapt to elements of current importance, such as the presence of the Trothas in Omaruru in 2007. The Gibeon event lays much more emphasis on enjoyment in contrast to the rather stern Ovaherero commemorations. Significantly in 2005, when commemorating the centennial of his great-grandfather's death in action, the *Kaptein* stressed that this was not just an occasion of mourning, but also one to rejoice in the fact that his great-grandfather, Hendrik Witbooi Snr, the linchpin of communal and national identity, had lived. Still, in 2008, when the theme was the celebration of the *Kaptein's* and his Deputy's, *Onderkaptein* Christiaan Rooi's, 30th anniversary in office, a reason given for the omission of the usual historical re-enactment was that this feature in the programme related to mourning, and therefore was inappropriate for this time of celebration. Moreover, while speeches also figure importantly during this event, they are interspersed with cultural performances of various kinds, which are clearly meant to convey specific messages. Size and style of the various elements also vary. Thus, in 2005 the centenary of Hendrik Witbooi's death occasioned greater elaboration and drew bigger crowds than in other years, while 2007 was a much more intimate affair.

For all its colour, Heroes Day is a serious ritual, centred on commemorating the dead. What remains most important are 'the bones' as one junior traditional councillor phrased it⁴⁴ – the ceremony at the gravesite which can be traced back as the initial feature of the event, and in this way, forms its spiritual core.

There is a set of constant, symbolic elements or building blocks I want to focus on. They all speak to the memory of the genocide, the recuperation of communal life, including its material basis which above all consists of land, and the associated re-appropriation of

42 Talk with *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi, November 2006, motivating the omission of the festival in that year, on account of the huge effort involved in the centennial event in 2005.

43 This dimension is conspicuously absent from the nearly encyclopaedic overview of innovation in ritual in Bell (1997: ch. 7) which centres around post-modern and new age rituals.

44 Interview with Tamen Uinuseb, Windhoek, November 21, 2007.



Fig. 8.7 *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi's car, flanked by horse riders, arrives at the fountain, Gibeon 2008. Note detachment of Namibian Defence Force behind the car. Photograph: Michael Akuupa.

important sites. The following account synthesises the commemorations observed during the 1990s and 2000s in the general sequence of proceedings; where appropriate, I consider observations and material on earlier forms of the ritual and variations.

*Claiming space – opening the fountain*⁴⁵

The concern with spatial claim is evident from the opening ceremony on Friday night. Shortly before sunset, people assemble in the historic centre of Gibeon in front of a simple brick baldachin, the back of which is adorned with murals which depict, among other things, zebras drinking from a fountain, a reference to the Nama name of Gibeon, *Khaxa-tsūs*. The *Kaptein* and other dignitaries, who include visiting traditional leaders, then arrive in motor cars. On both sides, their procession is flanked by an impressive array of horse riders, and in some cases, marching bands are in front and at the back of the cars. The most conspicuous insignia displayed by these and other men are the gleaming white cloths which cover the crowns of their hats and are tied into knots sticking out on top. The *Kaptein* wears a distinct hat: in his case, the white cloth also covers the rim of the hat and is adorned in front by a golden star. Communal officials wear sashes in colours that signify their responsibilities and prerogatives. In contradistinction to observations from the 1970s, there is no discernible dress code. Many, though by no means all, women display the typical, patched and colourful

⁴⁵ The following sections refer to the commemoration as it evolved up to the 2008 event, the last one the late Hendrik Witbooi could attend and lead. After an intermission of two years following the *Kaptein's* decease in 2009, the commemoration was again held in 2011, which I could not observe. Fully aware that changes may be imminent, particularly with the resolution of the succession issue which in early 2015 remains unresolved, I keep the following largely in the ethnographic present.

Nama dresses or variations of white, usually with fine black dots as a distinctive sign of belonging to the Witbooi or IKhawese group. However, this ethnic marker is by no means exclusive. In particular during the big celebration in 2005, the white hat cloth was liberally distributed amongst visitors.

As is evident also in other commemorations, a considerable number of horse riders is prerequisite to give the event its required dignity. These riders observe a ritual, which in particular involves their separation from the rest of the festival crowd outside their explicit appearances. They are catered for at a separate kitchen and spend the night on a farm well outside Gibeon. This procedural approach is traced back to a tactical maxim of Hendrik Witbooi Snr, always to separate fighters from the rest of the community for security reasons.⁴⁶

At Friday shortly before sunset, proceedings commence with a brass choir performance and prayer, in one case also followed by an oral history account. After this, the fountain is ceremoniously opened by removing the metal covering lid in the platform under the baldachin. According to tradition, this fountain was discovered by Kido Witbooi, the *Kaptein* who first settled in Gibeon, from 1863 onwards. Water then is drawn from the fountain by lowering a bucket, and is passed out to participants, some of whom also bring along bottles to be filled with the water.⁴⁷

The brief ceremony not only gives temporal depth to the proceedings of commemoration to follow, but also lays a strong symbolic claim to specifically Witbooi control of Gibeon, which today is technically an incorporated town under an elected local authority, experiencing a considerable influx of people from other parts of Namibia, including the northern regions. At the same time, the conflict between Witbooi or IKhawese and descendants of the Bondelswarts, who were moved to Gibeon in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the course of the implementation of the homeland strategy, is still a reality. The fountain ceremony thus underscores the claim of the first comers.

Such assertion of territorial rights by first occupation and inheritance has also been present in the choice of alternative sites for the festival. As Etienne du Pisani (1976b: 43) reports, for some time the event was held at Krantzplatz, the former headquarters of the 'native reserve' near Gibeon and residence of *Kaptein* Dawid Witbooi. In 1998 the commemoration was held at the farm Hornkranz near the Gamsberg Pass, the site of the legendary mountain fortress of Hendrik Witbooi Snr. In 2004, the farm Goamus in the south-east of Gibeon was chosen, site of an important battle in 1905. In the case of Hornkranz, this choice of festival site was linked to an explicit, though unsuccessful effort to re-appropriate the farm, which lies some 200 km north-west of Gibeon, for Witbooi, while Goamus figured importantly in the early attempt to reassert Witbooi control after 1915 (cf. ch. 7; Kössler 2005b: 196–211).

46 Oral communication, Tamen Uinuseb, during the festival in 2007; see also E. du Pisani 1976b: 43 and *supra* for earlier similar usage.

47 Again, there is variation. In 1995 people filed to receive the water, while in 2007 and 2008, it was passed out in more haphazard fashion, mainly to children who thronged to receive a sip. The upkeep of the fountain has varied considerably over time, but in principle has been a communal concern.



FIG. 8.8 Dispensing water drawn from the fountain, Gibeon 2008. Photograph: Michael Akuupa.

After the ceremony at the fountain, the *Kaptein* and his closest entourage, along with the riders, return to the *Kaptein's* house, which is situated in what has been known since 1915 as the Witbooi location. Here, registration of participants is performed. They pay a small fee (which has been N\$ 10 for a considerable length of time) and enter their names in a book. This book contains the records of the event since the 1970s – the lists and numbers of the (registered) participants and a brief assessment of each year's event by the *Kaptein*. The rest of Friday evening is spent rather leisurely at the compound adjacent to the *Kaptein's* house, which also includes a festival site with a stage built from concrete and a small memorial to Hendrik Witbooi Snr, flanked by flagstaffs for the national flag and the Witbooi banner. Chairs are provided for spectators, food is served to all participants (guests of honour are accommodated in the *Kaptein's* house), and there is talk, music, dancing and socialising.

Re-enacting and remembering

Proceedings recommence on Saturday morning. This is the day that contains most of the festival activities which tend to draw a sizeable crowd of spectators, in particular the historical re-enactment. Normally, a rider's performance is staged in the bed of the Fish River to bring back a portion of Witbooi history. As has been mentioned, this is also variable, and in 2008 the re-enactment was replaced by an early morning assembly at Gibeon Station, some eight kilometres to the east on the main road from Mariental to Keetmanshoop, to commemorate

a vital confrontation in 1976 between Hendrik Witbooi, then school principal and secretary to his predecessor Hendrik Samuel Witbooi, and the Secretary of the then Department of Coloured, Rehoboth and Nama Affairs during the epic Nama teachers' strike. The *Kaptein* recounted this event in an extended speech. By commemorating this turning point, after which a large group of Nama traditional leaders joined SWAPO, the contribution to the liberation struggle of Witbooi in particular, and the south more generally, was underlined. The dignity of this component of the event was enhanced in this case by the presence of a considerable number of horse riders.

The usual schedule is organised in a way which enables guests of honour arriving from Windhoek in the morning and leaving for the capital in the late afternoon, to attend the most conspicuous events. Arguably, they forego in this way not only the seminal graveside service on Sunday but also much of the fun and socialising. Such guests of honour have included, at various times after independence, politicians of national standing such as cabinet ministers or the Speaker of the National Assembly. Generally, these personages also give keynote addresses. However, the presence of members of the diplomatic corps, such as the Chinese ambassador or the UNDP representative to Namibia was also noted. Obviously, attendance of these dignitaries reflected the high status of the late Hendrik Witbooi on a national scale, but also served various forms of alliance building and in all likelihood, also catered to the curiosity of prominent foreign visitors.

At the festival site adjacent to the *Kaptein's* house, the day's opening includes the ceremonial entry of the *Kaptein* and his entourage, the hoisting of the relevant flags – usually the Namibian, the African Union and the Witbooi flag – and the singing of the anthems associated with each flag. Also, the festival banner is unfolded, stating the dates of the current event, the year of commemoration from Hendrik Witbooi Snr's death, and a watchword in English and Nama. A procession then forms towards the bed of the Fish River. This procession includes horse riders and motorcars, and at bigger occasions such as in 2005, also marching groups, especially majorettes who perform during different stages of the festival. Other participants make their way informally on foot.

The point of reassembly is both symbolic and suited to the purpose. Its symbolism derives from the site's close vicinity to the former house of Hendrik Witbooi Snr, which stood right next to the Lutheran church; both buildings had been blasted by the German *Schutztruppe* in 1904 on the pretence of 'strategic reasons'; the church was rebuilt a few years later, but the site of the house remains empty, and some of the foundation can still be seen. The steep slope that gives into the river bed affords a superb viewing stand for observing the riders' performance in the river bed.⁴⁸ Here, the riders stage replays of episodes usually taken from the old *Kaptein's* life, and the skirmish when he received a fatal wound forms the most frequent topic of performance. The staging involves above all evolutions, chases and parades of the horse riders. In 2005, in an expanded version, side events were included, such as alliance building with the Simon Koper group (*Fransmanne*, or !Kharakhoen) and women receiving

48 An earlier form seems to have been a much less conspicuous mock battle staged days before the actual festival began; see E. du Pisani 1976b: 43 and *supra*.

the tidings of Hendrik Witbooi's death. All these moves are explained to the spectators through a megaphone, conveying in Nama and in English the story that is represented. At some stage, women and children are given supporting roles to act, such as fleeing the scene of battle or mourning when the news of Hendrik Witbooi's death is conveyed. In 2007 in particular, this involved people joining the performances from the spectators' stands. However, most of the time, the area where the horse riders perform and also shoot some live ammunition is sealed off by police, particularly from children, for safety reasons. Yet a ceremonial salvo is shot from next to the *Kaptein's* seat in commemoration of his famed predecessor and great-grandfather.

The re-enactment of historical events addresses a number of needs and concerns. Most obviously and underlined regularly in relevant speeches, this feature is meant to make people, and in particular the youth, aware of their history. History is seen as a yardstick in life and as a medium to enhance attachment to the community. Next, the riders' appearance at the festival in general and the performance in particular, helps to further inclusion. Considerable numbers of young people are involved, some of whom also identify with different traditional communities who now reside in the area of Gibeon, in particular Bondelswarts besides IKhowsen. This gives them something to do, including time-consuming rehearsals, in a situation of widespread unemployment that hits youth particularly hard. Lastly, those who are not (yet) eligible to perform as horse riders are also given some role to play. At the same time, the horse riders are organised in a quasi-military way, sometimes referred to as 'the army'. All of this speaks to the dimension of socialisation that is prominent in particular in the second day of the commemoration: to educate the youth about Witbooi history and to keep the grown-ups aware. This purpose was also served by the question and answer session about Witbooi history and in particular Hendrik Witbooi's death, reported for 1973 by Etienne du Pisani (1976b: 48) and still observed in 1995. This feature no longer appeared at later occasions observed.

The performance clearly is staged as a representative event. It shows the potential of the community to mobilise horses and also alludes to their warlike tradition; this is most clearly brought out when, at the close of the reenactment, the riders assemble in a long line, holding their hats, as their main ethnic marker, ceremoniously in front. The gesture is reciprocated by all other male Witbooi among the spectators, while in most instances, a salute is fired. The use of guns and ammunition also alludes to overcoming colonial rule when 'natives' were banned from possessing these items. Lastly, the riders' performance highlights the role of the festival, not only as a venue to meet friends, and for many migrants to visit home, but also as a welcome interruption in the uneventful everyday life in Gibeon; this may also be gauged from the eager attendance of younger children.

In comparison to other forms of re-enactment that have grown popular, for instance on the battlefields of World War II, there are obvious and interesting contrasts. In Gibeon, no pretence is made for historical accuracy, which pre-occupies participants in Europe and also North America.⁴⁹ Here, the site is clearly a different one – the original not being

49 As well as tourists at the Waterberg (see ch. 5; Förster 2010: 103–9); very elaborate re-enactments are held at World War I and World War II sites in France (Petermann 2007).

known with any degree of precision. Dress also differs starkly, as Witbooi riders have no problem turning temporarily into German soldiers, simply by hanging their white hats on a tree. However, this practice also replicates a ruse in war to fool the *Schutztruppe* about the whereabouts of the guerrilla fighters. Yet there is no question of original uniforms, and the objective is clearly different – to convey to the community a sense of what they are supposed to embrace as their history. This concerns above all collective self-assertion and anti-colonial resistance.

Reconciliation, politics and culture

Back at the *Kaptein's* house, the programme evolves further, punctured by a recess at noon during which food is once again served. Besides prominent national and regional office holders who attest to the importance of the event as well as to its mastermind, speakers reflect political agendas, such as alliance building between traditional communities. This was the case in particular during the 1980s when the festival served as a rallying point in the movement for liberation and genuine independence against South African attempts to force an internal, unilateral solution to what was known as the Namibia problem. In a different conjuncture, speakers in 2005, at the centenary celebration, included a number of prominent Ovaherero leaders, thus documenting common concerns of traditional communities across still remembered past confrontations. In 2007, the presence of a delegation of the Red Nation, who are considered to be the senior Nama clan in Namibia, and whose ancestors were involved in bitter wars with the Witbooi during the 19th Century, clearly had a similar meaning. In 2008, the anniversary of the *Kaptein's* and *Onderkaptein's* investiture occasioned the presence of a considerable number of Nama traditional leaders. By their participation, alliance building in the present is intertwined with a mostly implicit form of overcoming historical, but still remembered, confrontations, some of which go back to pre-colonial times.

Such conflicts include the wars of the 19th Century, but especially at the 2008 occasion reference was also made to the conflicts around the South African strategy of unilateral independence and the concomitant Namaland institutions in the 1970s and 1980s. Explicit statements in speeches refer bluntly to the yet unfulfilled Witbooi agenda of restitution, as articulated by the *Kaptein* in 1995, during his tenure as Deputy Prime Minister in the national government (cf. Kössler 2008b: 227), or to the concern with reconciliation as well as with reparation for the injustice perpetrated against Nama, in addition to Ovaherero during the genocide of 1904–08, as voiced in a speech by *Kaptein* Petrus Koper of the Red Nation in 2007.

On a different level, and in a clearly different form, symbolic inclusion and alliance building was also evident in 1995, when a school choir from Keetmanshoop, largely made up of white children, performed Nama songs. At that occasion, white drum majorettes were also much in evidence. Such components testified to a palpable change, even when compared to Heroes Day in 1989, when such an appearance would have been quite unthinkable (Melber

2003). In 1995, this dimension of reconciliation was further brought out by the appearance of Dr Klaus Dierks, at that time Deputy Minister of Works, Transport and Communication, who also in his capacities as an historian and German speaking Namibian, reflected on the important role of Witbooi in the anti-colonial struggle.

A further important and recurrent feature besides cultural performances, are presentations of traditional implements, mainly used formerly for foraging *veldkos*, but also for carrying water or transporting young children on their mothers' backs. In spectators today, all of this elicits an air of estrangement, wonder and some merriment. Much closer to their present, it would seem, is the staging of the typical *Nama Stap* dance by a number of groups, in 2007 accompanied by outcries through the microphone, in English, of 'Do you feel the culture?' – a clear indication of the intended nexus between fun, pride and communal identification. Furthermore, moralising as well as humoristic sketches are staged by various groups. These performances address the pervasive problem of alcoholism and also the sometimes strained relationships between generations as well as genders. These performances, as well as interspersed appearances of oral or brass choirs, attest to a remarkable commitment by community members to the festival.

Saturday evening is given over to dancing and merry making, and in 2005, speakers in a particularly crammed programme persevered well into the night. Again, in 2008, a festive dinner was staged to celebrate the 30th anniversary in office of both the *Kaptein* and the *Onderkaptein*. By the limited space available at this function and the fee (although moderate) which participants were asked to pay, this dinner was restricted to a comparatively circumscribed group, largely persons who might be characterised as local and regional liberation elite. This composition also resonated in the accounts given on the occasion, quite in keeping with the theme set by the *Kaptein* in the morning when recounting his confrontations with South African officialdom.

The spiritual core

Sunday comprises the final and, in spiritual terms, the central elements of the event. There are two main items, a graveside religious service and a special commemoration for the *kapteins* who have ruled in Gibeon. Once again, a procession is formed by motor cars and horse riders, but this time, the arrival of the riders in front of the monument for Hendrik Witbooi Snr is much more stately, and they stand at attention for the *Kaptein* to emerge from his house and enter his car, which will travel at the head of a procession that takes the form of an auto convoy, with horse riders on either side. Pedestrians follow, once again in loose order. This way of proceeding differs starkly from accounts of former versions of the festival.⁵⁰ Reports from 1973 and 1989 relay an image much closer to the report of 1930 cited above, of a disciplined and strictly ordered procession on foot, possibly preceded by horse riders. Even though restricted, the recent availability of motor cars for transportation and

⁵⁰ See *supra*; oral communication, Henning Melber, February 24, 2008.

also as status symbols, may account for this change. Dignitaries now travel by car and leave the rest of the attendants to make their way as they see fit.

Participants then assemble at the section of the cemetery that is mainly used by Witbooi.⁵¹ The site for the service is shaded by large trees, some chairs are provided, others brought by participants who arrange themselves loosely among the graves, some of which have stately stones, while many simple stones inform, besides the names of the deceased, about their functions and offices within Witbooi communal structures, and carry the letters 'HW' or 'MW' as a reference to sponsorship by *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi Jnr or his father, Markus Witbooi. The service is led by a well-known pastor specifically asked for the occasion, and the sermons do not necessarily refer to the theme of the commemoration. The service is adorned by further performances of the brass choir.

Commemoration once again takes over after the close of the service, when the congregation moves a few steps to honour the grave of *Kaptein* Isaak Witbooi, the son and successor of Hendrik Witbooi Snr. As noted, the latter's grave is not known to this day, and the tombstone of his son and successor, Isaak Witbooi, carries an additional commemorative inscription for the father. Next to this grave, a plaque hoisted on a stone commemorates the Witbooi who fell victim to the infamous attack of German troops on Hornkranz on April 12, 1893. People here assume standing positions, and the *Kaptein*, now clad in a pastor's gown, takes over the reading from the scripture. This brief ceremony is consummated by salvos shot over the grave.⁵² During the whole procedure, horse riders circle the cemetery at frantic speed, obviously showing off their prowess. All participants then wander back about 2 km to the *Kaptein's* house, as before in cars or on foot.

Here, the last stage of the festival is now enacted. This ritual has evolved from the candle ceremony observed in 1973 and continued well into the 1990s. Its omission in 1995 was motivated by the excessive heat which would have made the candles melt. The problem has been resolved by changing from candles to a row of differently coloured electric bulbs. Associated with this new technology is the transfer of the ritual from inside the AME church, where it formed part of a religious service, into the open air setting of the festival stage. These bulbs no longer symbolise the Witbooi *kapteins* only, but also other important personages and groups, such as liberation fighters and women. Their inclusion diversifies the otherwise strictly dynastic register of this ritual. As formerly with the candles, each bulb is ceremoniously lit by a specifically chosen person who takes over the microphone from the master of ceremonies to mention the relevant person's names, mother, date of birth and date of accession to the captaincy. After the lighting of all the bulbs has been completed, a different group of chosen persons in turn extinguishes the lights by switching off the bulbs, this time mentioning the dates when the persons commemorated in this way died.

51 There is an immediately adjacent Bondelswarts' section, formerly divided off by a fence which meanwhile has disappeared; a gravesite for the first two Witbooi *kapteins* in Gibeon, Kido Witbooi and Moses Witbooi, is situated off the cemetery on the other side of the gravel road to Maltahöhe. Gibeon also has a derelict white cemetery at a considerable distance from these sites.

52 These salvos are fired at the same stage of the programme as the salutation observed by du Pisani (1976b), see *supra*.



Fig. 8.9 Closing ceremony, lighting up bulbs symbolising former *kapteins* and protagonists, Gibeon 2007. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

After this solemn ceremony, the festival closes with the lowering of flags, once again accompanied by the singing of the anthems.



This commemoration certainly is the most elaborate and also the most extended in time of all the events discussed in this chapter. At the same time, the more or less set basic structure allows for considerable variation. This feature has been used in the past and under the auspices of the late *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi Jnr not least to further aims and respond to exigencies that clearly point beyond the commemorative event, its cue and the community that plays a central role in staging it. In various ways, national concerns have been addressed, and this has happened – in any case during the occasions observed – within a framework of unquestioned commitment and loyalty to SWAPO as the liberation movement in power, where the *Kaptein* held cabinet posts during the first three governments (1990–2005).

Still, this did not prevent the organisers and the *Kaptein* personally from pursuing agendas and issues that spoke specifically to concerns of I!Khowesen. Such issues concerned the sour question of land restitution, pursued with quite limited success by the community and its leaders, in one way or another, at least since 1919. Another dimension consisted in

the building of alliances, both with various traditional leaders, such as Ovaherero, in the context of the centennial event of 2005, which also enhanced in special ways the connection of the commemoration with the Namibian War. In other forms in 2008 more regional concerns were brought to the fore, with an unprecedented array of Nama traditional leaders in attendance. In these specific ways, Heroes Day in Gibeon blends communal and regional with national concerns.

*Vaalgras wys: Contradictions of the past – *mélange* for the future*

Our fourth example comes from still further south and draws on particularly involved and contradictory historical references. Vaalgras, a farm some 80 km north-east of Keetmanshoop, the urban centre of southern Namibia, has a varied meaning in Namibian history. In this area, Hendrik Witbooi received a fatal wound during the Nama–German War on October 29, 1905. For this reason, the farm was also known as ‘*Witbooisende*’ for some time into the 1920s. Moreover, the Vaalgras group, who have been settled for more than 100 years in the area, can claim a very specific intercultural position and historical background within the Namibian context (S. Biwa 2000; Silvester 2000). This background is played out in the commemoration which takes place early in May every year. The festival takes its cue from the date in 1971 when the remains of Elias Stephanus, who had led his people to Vaalgras and had been buried in Keetmanshoop, were transferred to Vaalgras (also Silvester 2000: 491) on the occasion of the removal of the ‘native’ cemetery in Keetmanshoop.

The Vaalgras people, also known as Herero Orlam,⁵³ consider themselves to be Nama speaking Ovaherero. They trace the origins of their group from Ovaherero, who on account of various circumstances such as drought, but also war related events such as flight, captivity and slavery, made their way to the southern fringe of Great Namaqualand during the wars of the second half of the 19th Century. Probably to evade oppression by Nama masters, the group crossed the Orange River, and for some thirty years made their living by wage labour on farms, particularly at the Oukiep Copper Mine in Little Namaqualand. In this way, they acquired considerable wealth in livestock and ox wagons as well as skills, both of which qualified them as freight drivers once they returned to present-day Namibia in the 1890s.

Their first place of call north of the Orange River was Warmbad, where they formed a close alliance with the Bondelswarts, whose traditional capital is located there. Later, the group were allocated the farm of Vaalgras by the German colonial authorities.

A central part of the communal self-image, conveyed during the festival, refers to the strenuous work required to make a liveable place out of an area lacking even a single well for safe access to open water. The community kept out of the Nama–German War and in fact,

53 This ethnonym needs to be set apart from the denomination as ‘Oorlam’ of Nama speaking groups who immigrated into southern and central Namibia across the Orange River during the first two thirds of the 19th Century.

acting as an 'economic elite that had become closely integrated into the colonial economy' (Silvester 2000: 483), they aided the German war effort by freight riding. Such services were honoured by the colonial authorities who awarded the community with a reasonably safe title for possession of Vaalgras (S. Biwa 2000: 8). However, it would be rash to label such cooperation as *collaboration*, given the intricacies and contradictions that emerge when we consider the options that were open to agency for the colonised (cf. Steinmetz 2007: 66). Moreover, important Bondelswarts leaders in that group's long and prestigious history of anti-colonial resistance, above all Jacob Marengo, had close links to the Vaalgras group, mainly through intermarriage.

The group managed to hold on to Vaalgras, even through the brief period of war that preceded South African occupation of Namibia in 1914 and 1915 and through the initial phases of South African reserve policy in the 1920s. At this time the Tses Reserve was 'assembled' (Silvester 2000: 484) in a haphazard manner, accommodating a motley array of groups from all over southern Namibia. Eventually, Vaalgras was attached to this reserve.⁵⁴ Although even by the early 1900s community members generally seem to have lost all knowledge of Otjiherero, spokespersons kept asserting their Ovaherero identity, even though the record shows ambiguities with interchangeably using the self-reference 'Damara'.⁵⁵ Thus, in 1927 Headman Jan Appollus protested against the use of Nama instead of Otjiherero as a medium of instruction in school.⁵⁶ This issue re-surfaced during the following decades, and in 1953, a community representative explained to the Chief Native Commissioner: 'I have a complaint, namely, our lost tribe, we have lost our language. We would like our children to learn once again our language in school, which is the Herero Language'.⁵⁷

As Silvester notes, this insistence on 'remaining defiantly "Herero"' (2000: 492) did not prevent the community from strongly and successfully resisting designs to resettle them to the Hereroland homeland in the course of the implementation of the Odendaal Plan. Instead they were integrated into the homeland of Namaland, while the Otjiherero speakers who also resided in the former Tses Reserve, were moved to the homeland of Hereroland. Silvester (2000: 491) links this successful resistance against removal to the reburial of Chief Elias Stephanus. Even though this context was not mentioned when I observed the festival in 2007, the connection conveys to the event a clear aura of anti-colonial resistance, linked to the loyalty of the reigning headman to SWAPO. In the course of the conflicts of the 1980s,

54 Whereas Tses was formed from the former part of Berseba lying east of the railway line, which had been acquired by the Administration to cover accumulated debt of Berseba, Vaalgras was adjacent to this piece of territory (see Kössler 2005b: 45–9).

55 Silvester 2000: 488; the matter may also be complicated by the 19th Century usage of 'Damara' for groups that today are addressed as 'Herero'.

56 NAN, Edu E. 18/41/4/1 vol. 1, Director of Education Dr C. Frey to Rev. F. Eisenberg, Manager of the Rhenish Mission School, Vaalgras, 8 September 1927. This finding is at variance with Silvester (2000: 488) who possibly confounded the different meanings of 'Damara' which in earlier terminology can also mean 'Herero'.

57 NAN, A217/25 vol. 1, Zacharias Bewa [Biwa] in Jaarlikse Vergadering: Tses Naturelle Reservaat Gehou op die 10de Augustus 1953. (See NAN, Edu E. 18/41/4/5, correspondence from the early 1960s on); Biwa (2000: 12) reports a similar complaint by Rev. Willem Konjore in 2000.

Chief Joël Stephanus, who also presided over the event observed in 2007, was deposed by the South African authorities. His replacement by Josef Stephanus, a DTA sympathiser, caused a long-term rift within the community. After independence, Joël Stephanus was reinstated.

The lay-out of the Vaalgras event differs from previously considered events in important ways. Vaalgras was never an urban centre or town, and except for some adjacent farms to the north and east, there was no immediate local settler presence during colonial times. Therefore, the issue of re-appropriation recedes against an assertion of community identity linked to the particular area.

The 2007 event⁵⁸ reflected these contradictory features quite clearly. This showed especially in the ways aspects of Ovaherero and Nama practice were synthesised and in the highlighting of Ovaherero features in specific ways. The central theatre of the event was formed by an array of simple buildings erected for the purpose: a baldachin, a kitchen and a shelter. Whitewashed stones marked a wide circle around the assembly area, obviously keeping out cars as well as horse riders, more by symbolic means than by actually presenting obstacles.⁵⁹ Some time before the opening ceremony, which took place on Saturday night, a small *oturupa* detachment from Aminuis – a former ‘Herero’ reserve on the Namibia–Botswana border – were prominently practising and displaying their marching skills.

As nightfall approached, people began to assemble in front of the baldachin, where the dignitaries were placed, including Chief Joël Stephanus and the then Cabinet Minister Willem Konjore, who acted as master of ceremonies. The proceedings were opened by the entry of the *oturupa* detachment, who performed long and elaborate evolutions before they finally arrived at their appointed places. This was followed by an intricate hoisting of flags, which included those of the African Union, Namibia, Vaalgras as well as the Ovaherero Green and Red Flags. The Vaalgras flag is a black cloth with small white dots, reminiscent of the connection with Bondelswarts.⁶⁰ This was also the colour on bands around men’s hats and on some women’s dresses. The latter ranged from an adaptation of Nama dress to typically Ovaherero dresses.

The flags were greeted by the anthems for the AU and Namibia and by the Vaalgras *volkslied* for the others. This song of communal identification renders an extensive account of the exploits and labour of the ancestors to make Vaalgras, originally a farm without a single water hole, the liveable place it now is. Linked to this was a further theme also taken up in later speeches, the need for diligent and strenuous work, as exemplified by the achievements of the Vaalgras people, who by these means established themselves where they are now and created the means for a proper living which were lacking before in the

58 The event took place on 5–6 May 2007. Thanks to Memory Biwa, Cristiana Fiamingo and Christian Williams for their cooperation and friendship.

59 A visit in March 2014 showed clearly more elaborate buildings on the site, now fenced off, the circle of stones remaining just outside the fence.

60 During the event mentioned in the introduction to chapter 9 (see *infra*), Willem Konjore pointed out that this was the original Bondelswarts flag which was exchanged for the present two-sided black and white one on occasion of the peace treaty of Ukamas (cf. Bühler 2003: 298–317) with the Germans, to which, according to this account, a faction headed by Jacob Marengo objected and held on to the old flag.

area. Reference to these civilisational accomplishments and attitudes permeated many speeches during the event.

The *oturupa* contingent was integrated into these ceremonies, and in his speech, Willem Konjore expressed his hope that in a year's time, Vaalgras would be able to rely on its own small group of young people who would be able to perform the exercises now demonstrated by the guests from Aminuis. In these and other ways, a concern was shown to inculcate proper Ovaherero ways and culture into Vaalgras people. The existence of *oturupa* in Tses Reserve is reported as far back as the 1920s, but these apparently belonged to the Ovaherero group who later moved out (Silvester 2000: 487–8). Apparently, this former presence did not have a lasting impact on Vaalgras. When the forebears of the Vaalgras group had been separated from their original Ovaherero groups during the 19th Century, *oturupa* in their present form did not yet exist. Thus, the proclaimed desire to implant this practice in Vaalgras now underscores its importance as a marker for identifying as Ovaherero.

After the speeches and the marching, the flags were lowered again in a ceremonial way, with people once more singing the national anthem. Once the formal proceedings for the evening had been closed in this way, food was served, and two bands played in succession, and reportedly, some participants kept dancing until after midnight.

The festival resumed the next morning around 9 a.m. on Sunday, with a one hour delay in comparison to the original schedule. Again, the flags were hoisted in a ceremony similar to the one the previous evening, with the addition of a horse rider in front of each flagpole. After prayer, and a scripture reading and sermon by Willem Konjore, centring on the need for brotherly love, further historical accounts followed. These highlighted the Vaalgras community's fate of having been caught up in 'two wars, namely the "Nama–Herero/Herero–Nama War" and the "genocide war"'. A further recurrent theme was the exemplary role of Vaalgras, epitomised in the phrase '*Vaalgras wys* – Vaalgras shows the way!' This claim was further bolstered by stressing the community's contribution to the liberation struggle and its adherence to the SWAPO party after independence. Interspersed were admonishments by the master of ceremonies to cut out private conversation and focus on what was said at the podium.

After an announcement that lunch would be served after the visit to the graveyard and to the memorial for Hendrik Witbooi, a long procession of horse riders and cars moved to the community's main cemetery, some three or four kilometres west of the festival site. The entry into the cemetery was again styled by elaborate marching of the *oturupa* in front of the gate. After passing into the cemetery, the *oturupa* formed the head of the procession, followed by the men, with the women at the back.⁶¹ Treading between the graves, the procession first reached the far (northern) side of the cemetery, then proceeded along the fence to the graves of the three chiefs who are buried here. At this site, another succession of speeches followed, this time also by Chief Joël Stephanus. Once again, these speeches centred around the need for hard work to build up the community. In this discourse, a recurrent theme

⁶¹ Note that in contradistinction to practice in Okahandja as well as in Omaruru, there is no rite announcing the visitors to the ancestors.



Fig. 8.10 Procession through the cemetery to reach the chiefly graves, Vaalgras, 2008. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

was the lack of water in the area when the group first arrived under the leadership of Elias Stephanus. The Chief stressed that the wars of the past had been overcome, and he appealed for peacefully working together, yet also referred to the heroes of the South: Jacob Marengo, Hendrik Witbooi, the Bondelswarts leaders Abraham Morris and Johannes Christiaan to whom a close relationship is claimed, and Cornelius Frederick of Bethanie, a Nama leader during the Namibian War. A Ovaherero representative introduced the theme of kinship ties between the Vaalgras community and the Ovaherero living in the centre of the country. Three ceremonial salvos over the graves were accompanied by praise songs extolling Vaalgras and Hendrik Witbooi, while many people held their hands over their ears to stave off noise from the shots, but still kept on singing. During this ceremony, horse riders circled the graveyard, with the Vaalgras boys evidently charging, aiming to overtake Ovaherero representatives from the northern parts.

Willem Konjore reminded participants that before the closing ceremony at the festival site, there would be a visit to the site of a memorial erected at a spot thought to be the place of Hendrik Witbooi's fatal shooting. The speaker on this occasion also referred to the old name of the area as '*Witbooisende*'. Since Hendrik Witbooi's grave is unknown, Konjore claimed all of Vaalgras as 'holy ground': The hero's unmarked and unknown gravesite might in fact be anywhere there. Participants filed out of the cemetery, and the car and horse rider procession passed by the festival site to the memorial site for Hendrik Witbooi some two kilometres to the east. Here once again the *oturupa* paraded – a startling performance in honour of a personage who today is considered a national hero, yet whose bitter conflicts and fierce fighting with Ovaherero are by no means forgotten. Willem Konjore recounted the story of how Hendrik Witbooi had met his death at this spot in an effort to break through the German barrier to procure water for his people and to open their way back to Gibeon. At

this site also three salvos were fired, and as before at the cemetery, these shots were preceded by admonishments to beware of the live ammunition.

After participants had returned to the festival site, Willem Konjore in a closing speech once again reminded listeners of the importance of history and promised more detail and variation as an enticement to come back the following year. This speech was followed by an intervention from one of the Ovaherero visiting from central Namibia, who rehearsed the precise kinship relations and clan affiliations of Vaalgras people amongst Ovaherero, referring in particular to the chiefly Tjikuirire family, later renamed Stephanus. The speaker then recited a long list of names of Ovaherero who had come to Vaalgras in efforts to trace kin in the present.

The serving of lunch was accompanied by the performance of a girls' dancing group, and followed a ceremonial order in which food, brought from the kitchen by women, was passed out by elderly male dignitaries. After the meal, the event petered out in informal socialising, along with the departure of guests who had arrived from outside.

This event bears fascinating testimony to efforts which address, in performative as well as in argumentative fashion, difficult issues of communal identity formation and identity management. Through the staging of the event and the narratives offered during its course, the leaders of the Vaalgras community assert on the one hand the group's specific achievements in reaching comparative prosperity, their contribution to the liberation struggle and continuing support for the ruling party. On the other hand, they also negotiated the somewhat difficult part of the group's heritage, the ambivalent stance of at least some amongst their forebears during the Nama–German War, by stressing the community's relations to the Bondelswarts leaders and appropriating the aura of Hendrik Witbooi. They hold fast to the specific position of their group by identifying as 'lost' Ovaherero and aspiring to the central features of present-day Ovaherero culture, which in fact has gone through considerable transformation since the group's ancestors arrived in southern Namibia and the northern Cape some 130 to 140 years ago. In this way, Vaalgras leaders combine the articulation of a strong sense of belonging and local identification with the assertion of the community's place in a national history.

CUSTOM, HISTORY AND POLITICS

The commemorations reviewed in this chapter demonstrate the central place held by joint rituals for upholding and reproducing community ties, and for kin and friends to meet and renew personal bonds. All this is couched in a symbolic language that encompasses clear, if unevenly elaborate and extensive reference to the respective group's histories. Mostly, such references involve personages and episodes that are linked to the Namibian War. This characteristic was reinforced during and after the centennial year of 2004, when further commemorations were introduced that are held primarily on battle sites of 1904, but also

honour personages, as is the case with the Shark Island event with the memory of Cornelius Frederick at its centre.

In the events reviewed and in their evolving practice, cultural forms and contents have been taken up from a range of sources, including pre-colonial customs, elements from missionary and church services, or the colonial military, but also more recent forms of global popular culture. These various elements, which are by no means all present at each of these commemorative events, have been re-shaped and re-combined in creative ways, adapted to the needs and concerns of the respective communities and of those who may be considered masterminds behind evolving memory events. In this way, syncretistic or, in the parlance of postcolonial studies, hybrid forms have sprung up and evolved further, as can be seen graphically in *oturupa* uniforms and marching practices, but also in the assemblage of diverse elements into Heroes Day in Gibeon.

To a considerable extent, such practices or customs have, over time, been institutionalised into traditions (cf. Hobsbawm 1983: 9). This is most clearly the case with the Ovaherero *oturupa*, which today form an unquestioned and indispensable, central component of Ovaherero commemorations, to the point of being coveted by people in Vaalgras in their quest for Ovaherero-ness (see also Silvester 2000).

In these ways, and with their considerable variations in temporal depth and style, commemorations such as those recounted were poised to become tribunes for projecting the concerns and goals of the communities involved. Taking their cues from historical events, this holds particularly true for issues of memory politics. In subtexts, the challenge to a prevailing narrative of national history that largely marginalises the communities who most intensely experienced the Namibian War and its aftermath, including communal reconstruction, is present in the very performing of such commemorations themselves. Once the issues of how to deal with the violent heritage of the Namibian War and associated memory, including collective trauma, had come to the fore more clearly soon after Namibia gained independence, demands for an apology from Germany and resulting reparations gained momentum. Now these issues have become much more than a subtext. In various ways that were marked by political party allegiances of the main movers, commemorations have become important venues for articulating the call for adequate redress.

As we shall see, these as well as other associated initiatives built up pressure and momentum that wrought appreciable change in Namibia, both in the national government's attitude towards concrete demands for apology and reparations, and in its projected image of the national past. Alas, as most recent developments in particular have shown, this has not brought about the harmony which many have hoped for, but which once again has proved elusive, on account of clearly diverse interests and overarching goals. Before addressing these issues more extensively in Part III, it is worthwhile to pause for a brief look at the ways in which images of Namibian national history are evoked and constructed, as well as at some of the obstacles experienced in such an undertaking.

9

Beyond a Fragmented Image of History

PRELUDE

ONE DIMENSION OF COMMUNAL COMMEMORATIONS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN NAMIBIA involves giving voice to the often unheard and unremembered from the struggles. Most often, these were anti-colonial struggles. At the Bondelswarts commemoration held late in 2008 in Warmbad, these issues materialised with particular clarity. It is worthwhile to recall here what happened.

Warmbad is a small village in the far south-eastern corner of Namibia, accessible by a 50 km gravel road from Karasburg, a town on the main transport corridor to Upington in South Africa; the border crossing to South Africa at Onseepkans on the Orange River is another 80 km further south, and used only occasionally. Warmbad seems fairly far removed from the central workings of our globalised world. However, it was not always such a remote place. It used to be a regional centre. The Bondelswarts group (*!Gami-#nun*), one of the Nama communities who look back to centuries of living in this arid region and to a record of singularly sustained anti-colonial resistance, consider Warmbad their traditional capital. During the 19th Century, this was the most important entry point for a succession of Oorlam migrant groups who were to settle in Namibia, as well as for the first missionaries to be stationed in the region.

October 25, 2008 was a special day, since the visit of the President was expected in this remote area of Namibia. The event occasioned an inconspicuous, but significant scene:

Author's field notes: On October 25, 2008 Warmbad enjoys a measure of attention that many local people have considered their due for a long time. The annual commemoration of the Bondelswarts is linked with the visit of the President of

Namibia. To honour the occasion, the President will unveil a memorial stone for national hero Jacob Marengo.¹ This has been postponed from the date on the stone, September 20, to suit the schedule of the President's southern tour. Before the unveiling ceremony, a local history expert, as well as Minister Willem Konjore, who is traveling with the President but who is also a great-grandson of Jacob Marengo, recount the epic story of Marengo's and the Bondelswarts' resistance against German, and later South African, colonial rule. Salient events include the killing of *Kaptein* Jan Abram Christiaan in front of his house on October 25, 1903, which sparked the succession of great anti-colonial wars during the following five years, and is commemorated also today, and the resistance rising in 1922 which led to the massacre committed by the fledgling South African Air force against the Bondelswarts. The accounts of these events have a startling effect on the President. When he takes the speaker's platform, he begins with an apology for having brought an inappropriate manuscript for his speech. He, as well as his speech writers, had not been aware of the importance of the South and particularly of Warmbad in Namibia's history. Above all, the President tells his audience, they had not been aware of the great contribution of Bondelswarts to anti-colonial resistance. After this candid admission, President Pohamba continues with his prepared speech and afterwards proceeds to unveil the memorial stone.

This episode underlines with striking clarity the problems stemming from Namibia's fragmented past when it comes to the construction of a national history, and an image of the nation that gives due cognizance to the very diverse experiences and contributions of its various regions and groups (see ch. 1; Kössler 2007a, 2010). This episode reminds us once again that different groups in Namibia today have different resources and means to raise their voices and let their views and concerns about the past be heard. Their chances to influence the prevailing vision of the past are clearly unequal. This is certainly related to the vision of the dominant and ruling party, which by and large has privileged for a long time an image of the liberation war as the founding act of the nation. This military image highlights the experience and contribution of Namibians in exile as well as of inhabitants of the northern regions. Economic power that can be mobilised to press the concerns of a group which is richly endowed materially is of particular relevance in a grossly unequal society such as Namibia. Fault-lines still run along ethnic divides (see ch. 1).

One may also gauge from this incident that for once, in this particular situation with the President attending a communal commemoration, the skewed image of history adhered to by the government and the ruling party was put straight for a moment. In this case, the strategic dimension of the commemoration, that is reproducing and projecting the community's historically grounded claims and concerns, was spectacularly successful. As

1 I see the variety of forms Marengo's name takes, along with the connected claims, as one further expression of the difficult history of southern Namibia, and here, as well as throughout, use the form and spelling employed on the memorial stone.

I shall argue in this chapter, there were a number of moves, including on the part of the Namibian Government that point in such a direction. They were linked to the dynamics of what one may call the transnational memory conflict that involves a fairly wide range of actors both in Namibia and Germany. Before we take a closer look at these issues and processes in the third part of this book, the present chapter will review briefly some of the efforts to explicitly challenge the established narrative of Namibian history and map out a trajectory that indicates some palpable change in this field.

CHANGING A SKEWED VISION OF NATIONAL HISTORY

To challenge and alter skewed images of Namibian history, two approaches or strategies may be distinguished. As exemplified in communal commemorations, the history of the respective communities and particularly their contributions to anti-colonial resistance is celebrated. Yet there is also the approach to tease out links and commonalities in the historical process that had been neglected by conceptions which emphasised the experience, struggles and sufferings of one particular group.

Concerns related to such revisions have been pursued for a considerable time. As we saw in the preceding chapter, there were sustained efforts to present Heroes Day in Gibeon as a venue of the national liberation struggle, not just to stage and reproduce Witbooi communal memory. Throughout the 1980s, this aim was pursued mainly by inviting appropriate guests of honour whose presence would stand for the unity of the liberation struggle and in particular for alliances of Witbooi, viz., !Khowesen with other traditional communities. In particular Herero spokespersons engaged the hegemonic historical image shortly after independence in a number of ways. The Herero commemorations we saw in the preceding chapter included interventions in the spoken or printed word, performance and ritual as decisive features.

As Larissa Förster (2010: 253–6) has shown in her in-depth study of Waterberg memory landscape, in the early days after independence the local Ohamakari Day commemoration, as other *omazemburukiro*, served the interrelated triple purposes of relating history, enacting and celebrating tradition. Above all, this took place in the form of *oturupa* parades, and political pronouncements, mainly by DTA representatives. As Förster demonstrates, all these elements served *both* the assertion of Herero identity and the fostering of nation-building: In the perspective of ‘unity in diversity’, it was possible for Ovaherero ‘to position themselves, on the one hand, as part and parcel, but on the other hand also as a distinct group within the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) of the Namibian nation’ (Förster 2010: 256). In this way, the claim for a distinct cultural or ethnic identity could at least potentially be joined into an overarching Namibian one. As Förster recounts further (2010: 259), this construction, reminiscent in some ways of the postulate of a ‘rainbow nation’ in South Africa, has so far not turned out to be a stable, long-term proposition.

Clearly also reflecting the party political line-up, when arguably the majority of Ovaherero sided with the DTA opposition, speeches in the mid-1990s began to insist on a clearly distinct Herero trajectory, along with highlighting the issue of genocide. In this way, the discursive shift was also linked to the repeated rebuffs Herero representatives experienced from visiting German politicians. As will be detailed in the following chapter, the frustrated efforts to establish a direct link to German officialdom resulted in the reparations court case of the HPRC, which gained in popularity in the years after 1999 (Förster 2010: 266). Commemorations, in particular Herero Day in Okahandja, remained important venues, first for propagating the strategy to secure reparations and the related image of history, and second for a vision highlighting the achievements as well as sufferings, specifically of Ovaherero.

It needs to be added that during the centennial year of 2004, a considerable tendency towards a Herero exclusionism could be observed at this stage. This tendency has been overcome to a large extent by subsequent alliance building. Not only did this process bridge long standing ethnic divides, it also once again changed the ways in which people refer to the past. Eventually, these changes extended to the concepts of history and of the nation that informed the vision as well as the actions of the Namibian Government.

These various efforts and discursive strategies were inevitably characterised by highlighting as well as silencing specific aspects of the historical record. Such emphases as well as silences are inevitable, and because of that, it is by no means problematic to see our images of history as constructs that may also be diverse and even controversial. Struggles on the contested terrain of history, in particular where this concerns national history and the many concerns that feed into it, are precisely about such constructs. It is in this vein that Ernest Renan, in his classical lecture of 1882, saw a nation not so much as a community of remembrance, but rather as one of forgetting. However, such forgetting is not primarily about blotting out memory content, but about agreeing, consenting or even enforcing public silence about such content. Inevitably, in particular where written records exist and where debate about the valuation of history is an ongoing process, such content is still available to be addressed, depending on circumstance and discursive purpose. The issue therefore is not about actual forgetting in the sense of amnesia (voluntary, agreed upon or enforced), but of non-addressing facts and personages that may very well be present in the minds of actors (cf. Kössler 2011b, 2014c).

The image of the events of 1904 in Namibia serves us as an example. As we have seen (ch. 5), there is some heated argument even about facts that otherwise are considered well established, in particular concerning the genocide perpetrated by the *Schutztruppe*. Here, we look briefly at facts that nobody will argue about. Take the attack on Fort Namutoni by King Nehale's Ndonga warriors in 1904. Of course, the German military would revel in the successful defence of the fort. Yet views from the perspective of those who ostensibly were defeated are more interesting. Thus, in the early years of Namibian independence, claims emerged of serious misgivings on the part of Ovaherero about the way the attack on Namutoni was presented in the official history schoolbook. Rather than seeing OvaNdonga

‘at the margins’ (Schaller 2008) of the Namibian War, this version treated the battle of Namutoni almost on a par with that at Ohamakari (Waterberg), and thus tended to inscribe at least one of the northern, Oshiwambo speaking polities into the centre of primary anti-colonial resistance. In a quite unmediated way, then, a clear-cut continuity was constructed between the Herero–German War and the liberation war that began half a century later.

At the centennial commemoration of the battle at Ohamakari in 2004 (see ch. 11), the presence of Ndonga King Kauluma was in part motivated by reference to the battle at Namutoni, but at this occasion, Ndonga initiative was construed as an act of solidarity and support for the Herero war effort. More recently, the late Herero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako highlighted a similar connection, but gave it a different interpretative turn. Riruako claimed that the heroism shown by Herero and Nama warriors had helped to stave off German colonial expansion towards the north and in this way saved the Oshiwambo speaking groups from direct colonial subjection (NE 2.2.2012). This notion reflected both the alliance that had been forged between Herero and Nama traditional leaders and a national nexus, into which the contribution of groups from central and southern Namibia was forcefully inscribed. Inversely, it would not serve such purposes to harp on the different stages of the Namibian War, when Nama rose in arms only in October 1904, and particularly Witbooi were instrumental as auxiliaries to the *Schutztruppe* as late as the battle at Ohamakari on August 11, 1904. The plight of these soldiers, who were suddenly disarmed, imprisoned and deported to Togo, forms part of the Witbooi trajectory of suffering after the war (Hillebrecht & Melber 1988).

Obviously, the two strands cannot easily be separated from each other, since the presence of the deportees in central Namibia, where they were imprisoned, was predicated on their role as part of the German war effort. On one level, such ambiguities refer us to the exigencies faced by the colonised in efforts to safeguard their survival along with the communal nexuses on which their livelihood was based (cf. Hillebrecht 2015; Kössler 2005b: part II). Attendance of a group from the Red Nation at Heroes Day 1995 in Gibeon was warmly welcomed but not without a comment about the confrontations between their forebears and Witbooi during the 19th Century, which happily could now be disregarded.

A different strategy of projecting an overarching historical perspective that might even parade as a version of national history has been followed by proponents of viewpoints ascribed to German speakers in Namibia. This has been noted in connection with the relocation of the Rider statue from its original place, when one argument put forward was that by this change, ‘our’ or ‘Namibian’ history would be obliterated (see ch. 6). Quite clearly, in this case the association of German speakers (or the authors of such statements) with ‘Namibians’ was implicitly meant to project the idea that a narrowly sectional view of Namibian history, epitomised by the Rider, was in fact generally accepted. Obviously, such an argumentative ruse could have only a limited impact. Still, a structurally identical way of reasoning was instantly advanced when in August 2013 President Hifikipunye Pohamba announced measures resulting from the report of the Delimitation Commission. These changes included the creation of a new region and of new constituencies and also the renaming of Caprivi in Zambezi Region and

of Karas Region to !Kharas. Furthermore, Schuckmannsburg was to be renamed Luhonono and Lüderitzbucht, !Nami#Nūs. There were reasons for critical comment about these changes, such as the proliferation of posts for potential patronage or the top-down process in which the renaming and restructuring had been effected.

However, protest and controversy broke loose only about the renaming of Caprivi and in particular of Lüderitzbucht. It is certainly remarkable and even irritating that 'Caprivians' insist on basing their regional identity on the name of a Prussian bureaucrat who for some years was the rather hapless successor of Otto von Bismarck as German Chancellor. Count Caprivi acceded to the honour of being the namesake of the 'strip' that links Namibia to the Zambezi even today, by presiding over one of the colonialist *quid pro quos* that, in the late 1890s defined the particulars of cutting up and distributing Africa among the colonial powers. Subsequently, the name somehow stuck to a region that experienced its own specific trajectory under South African rule, precisely since it is far removed from the rest of Namibia. People's insistence on the colonial name may be linked to such circumstances as well as to the background of dramatic clashes about autonomy in the more recent past.

In the case of Lüderitzbucht, the new name was presented by critics as almost a kind of foreign imposition which once again supposedly undercut 'our' history and in some unexplained way also impinged on the cosmopolitan character of the little town. This reasoning, it was claimed, found adherents among a great number of *Buchters*, across ethnic, linguistic and racial divides.² It is hard to assess such claims from letters to the editors or reports about gatherings called to protest the change. However, there were two conspicuous absences in the clamour about 'history': None of the commentators thus engaged noted that the Nama name of !Nami#Nūs would take note of the fact that the region was part of !Ama traditional territory before late 1884, when Heinrich Vogelsang acquired it, in the name of Adolf Lüderitz, by a shady deal with *Kaptein* Joseph David Frederick of Bethanie. It was left solely to the incumbent !Ama *Kaptein* Dawid Frederick to remind the Namibian public of this fundamental fact (TN 2.9.2013). Appropriately, one commentator saw the brouhaha as an indication 'that to a large extent Namibians continue to live in cocoons rendering us culturally and linguistically illiterate about each other' (Gurirab 2013). Furthermore, the proponents of 'history' did not deem it fit to mention in their plea that !Nami#Nūs had been the central object of the land transaction which may be regarded as the initial act of defining the territorial shape of Namibia, and thus, in a way, its founding act. People who care to know their history will also remember that Vogelsang secured a large chunk of !Ama territory by blatantly fraudulent means. In this way, it is not only to largely colonial, but also to fairly unpalatable history – one may call it almost the 'founding fraud' of Namibia as a separate territory – that the name of Lüderitzbucht refers. On the other hand, a Nama name for the town acknowledges the long presence of Nama in the region.³

2 AZ 9.8.2013, 13.8.2014, 16.8.2013; TN 9.8.2013 16.8.2013, 23.8.2013

3 See further, Kössler 2013; since the government later specified that the new name of !Nami#Nūs applied only to the constituency, the name of the actual town was left in abeyance. When the issue resurfaced, some argued that *Kaptein* Frederick had no stake in the matter, since he resides in Bethanie (see Rep 20.2.2015, AZ 23.2.2015).

Historical memory, then, does not necessarily stand in the way of building bonds of alliance and solidarity across actual or apparent divides of various kinds. At the same time, when it comes to the national nexus, claims towards inscription of particular groups into the quasi-official version of history are obvious and strong. Thus, in the wake of the centennial year of 2004, Damara spokespersons began to assert both Damara contributions to anti-colonial resistance and corresponding suffering at the hands of the colonialists. This became a recurrent topic, fraught with the argument of being descendants of first comers in the region, besides San. Such sentiments were evident in an intervention by King Justus ǀGaroëb who at a late stage, in June 2011, appealed to President Hifipunye Pohamba for Damara to be included in the delegation who went to Berlin to collect 20 deported skulls (see ch. 12). Significantly, ǀGaroëb on the one hand listed Damara exploits and insisted that 'the ammunition of the foe could not distinguish between a ǀNukhoe/Damara, a Nama, a San and a Herero'. On the other hand, the King stressed 'the unity of the liberation struggle of all in Namibia' (*NamS* 13.6.2011).

The stance taken by the Namibian Government in the wake of the skull repatriation, which may well have been a turning point in this respect, also reflected the need to accommodate communal concerns while further insisting that issues which emanate from the Namibian War are of importance to all Namibians. By consenting that victim groups be able to get in direct contact with German diplomats from early 2012 onwards, the government brought out practical consequences of a considerable conceptual change. The road travelled to this point will form one central subject of the third part of this book.

The government's stand is not without its serious contradictions. Such contradictions became apparent in March 2014 with the second repatriation of human remains from Germany to Namibia.⁴ In what was seen by proponents of victim groups as an illegitimate appropriation of 'their' history, as testified by Trotha's extermination proclamations (first directed against Ovaherero in October 1904, later against Nama in April 1905) the Namibian Government strove to present both primary anti-colonial resistance and the genocide as integral parts of a national history that collapsed regional differences into a narrative of national unity. A short time later, Minister Jerry Ekandjo went even further when he motivated the government's refusal to place a plaque specifically commemorating the genocide committed against Ovaherero on the newly unveiled Genocide Memorial. Ekandjo proclaimed a vision of the genocide to extend over the entire colonial period of more than a century (*AZ* 27.6.2014). In this way, differences are levelled down, and one may say that unity wins out clearly over diversity. The leitmotif of not a joint, but a unitary, struggle obliterates differences in regional or group experience. This view differs clearly from former historical conceptions set forth by SWAPO which acknowledged the negligible impact of German colonialism on the northern regions (cf. Melber 2014a: 159; see SWAPO 1981: 14–5).

The Independence Memorial Museum that was opened a few days after the controversial repatriation testifies to this problem in yet a different form.⁵ In a number of murals which

4 The actual process will be detailed in ch. 12 below.

5 These remarks reflect my visit to the museum shortly after its opening, on March 27, 2014.

depict pre-colonial society and early anti-colonial resistance, personages from various regions, as well as from different periods are represented jointly – a united mass of Namibians standing against the coloniser. In reality, these people not only never met in person, they never had the slightest chance to consider the united action that is intimated by the murals. In this fairly hefty fashion, a national unity is conveyed that allows for a colourful variety of dress and also to an extent of phenotype, but levels down differences of historical experience, purpose and situation that inevitably form the starting point when a national nexus is slowly emerging and being worked out.⁶ In this way, the images presented in the museum dovetail with the approach the government took during the second repatriation of skulls.

From the viewpoint articulated by representatives of the communities affected by the genocide, the claim for national unity not only obliterated diversity, but in the eyes of many of them amounted to a forcible, and illegitimate appropriation of their historical experience – an experience they themselves were only now in the process of ensuring for themselves, before projecting it onto a wider public. Sadly, then, from the viewpoint of affected communities, the recognition of their historical contribution to anti-colonial struggle appeared predicated on the imposition of a unifying national narrative they found hard to accept. As previously discussed (ch. 1), the dominant official narrative in Namibia had favoured for a long time an almost exclusive emphasis on the liberation war of the 1960s to 1980s. In the aftermath of the centennial of the colonial genocide, this began to change (see chs. 10 & 11). To a certain and limited extent, then, long sought-after recognition for the role in and contribution to the anti-colonial and liberation struggle of groups in the central and southern regions has been achieved. Such recognition, however, comes with the corollary that the national government will integrate these experiences into a modified national narrative. In this way, such experiences are appropriated for the national image of history. Claims that the genocide should concern the entire nation and not just specific communities are an almost logical consequence, but at the same time, such claims sit uneasily with the insistence of affected communities on their specific victim status, above all as the express targets of General von Trotha's two proclamations calling for the annihilation of Ovaherero and Nama.⁷

The viewpoints, approaches and strategies drawn together in this brief chapter remain diverse and contradictory. It remains to be seen how controversies and struggles on the contested terrain of the image of the past will play out. The difficulties on a road towards

6 Note that comparable constructs are found elsewhere in the world as testimonies of efforts to forge national identity, e.g. the Walhalla memorial in Bavaria (dedicated 1842) which assembles images of eminent persons Germans are supposed to identify with, or in broadly similar terms, the Panthéon in Paris – although in these cases, images are presented in a group, and personages are still added to the ensemble.

7 The Second Return of the Skulls from Germany Press Statement by the Nama, Ovambanderu and Ovaherero Traditional Leaders. Speech read by Ester Muinjangué at a press conference, Wednesday 5 March at Red Flag Commando Hall, Windhoek: 4th March 2014; see also *NE*, 6.3.2014; OCD-1904 Statement by Acting Chief, Gerson K Katjirua, Chairperson of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide on the Occasion of the Welcoming of the 2nd Repatriation of 35 Human Skulls and 2 Skeletons from Germany, Parliament Gardens, Windhoek, 7 March 2014 (texts communicated by email, in the possession of the author).

a more unified or consensual version of national history may be highlighted by a rather morose anecdote. Late in February 2012, I accompanied a small group of activists to look into problems connected with a large number of human remains that had turned up near !Nami#Nūs the year before and most likely belonged to prisoners who had been employed in forced labour for the construction of the Southern Railway during the Namibian War. Some of the human bones were kept in large blue plastic bags in a special compartment at the police station. This site was opened for us to have a brief look at the pile of plastic bags. One of our group gave a sigh, saying 'Our people'. In response to this, the young police guard who was with us remarked matter-of-factly: 'People are dying every day' – clear testimony that concern with the consequences of the concentration camps during 1904–08 is not spread evenly throughout the southern port town, nor in Namibia at large (cf. Kössler 2012c).

10

A Mute Conversation: The Rise of the Reparations Issue

NAMIBIAN INDEPENDENCE CREATED FRESH OPPORTUNITIES FOR NAMIBIANS TO ADDRESS A past that to some extent had been silenced, but certainly not overcome or forgotten. Independence meant new opportunities of ‘voice’, of raising claims and eventually, forging alliances. Above all, independence also brought new avenues of engaging Germany about the colonial past and the genocide. In this chapter, I give a brief account of these early endeavours and the consequent frustrations, and then dwell on the reparations issue, particularly looking at the court case that was filed in the U.S.A. as a consequence of official German refusal to enter into serious dialogue.

POSTCOLONIAL ARTICULATION OF GRIEVANCES

The temporal coincidence between Namibian independence and German unification had significant consequences for the relations between these countries. The consequences pertain to the attention Namibia can count on in the German public mind, and to the issues of memory politics that form the centre of interest of this book.

During October and November 1989, while independence elections in Namibia were prepared and actually conducted, the ruling regime in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) imploded with astonishing speed. The Berlin Wall, emblem of global block confrontation, came down, and within less than a year, unification of Germany was consummated. In this process, SWAPO lost an important supporter of long standing (Schleicher 2002; Schleicher & Schleicher 1998: ch. 3), and one of the consequences appeared graphically in the sudden arrival in Windhoek (in 1990) of a few hundred youngsters who

had lived in a boarding school in Stassfurt in the GDR (Schleicher & Schleicher 1998: 200–201). The support provided by the Eastern bloc had not crumbled; it had virtually vanished, almost instantaneously.

Possibly the most important impact which the dramatic course of German unification during 1989–90 had for Namibian–German relations, however, was far less spectacular. This impact was actually the lack of spectacle. Within the German public, and probably beyond, unification and the wider chain of events when the Soviet bloc finally fell apart drew away much of the limited attention on Namibia. Under different circumstances, the end of colonial rule in Namibia might have mustered more attention in Germany as well as in other western countries. Moreover, not by accident, Namibian independence coincided with fundamental changes in South Africa: the accession of F.W. de Klerk to the presidency, the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the emerging perspective for the dismantling of Apartheid.

These long-awaited changes, along with Namibian independence, had the side effect of a swift demobilisation within the Anti-Apartheid Movement in (West) Germany (Bacia & Leidig 2008: 295–6), while in the eastern part, formerly well-established solidarity institutions fell into disarray (Weis 2011: 366–7; Schleicher 2002: 98–9). Taken together, there was a range of reasons why German public attention was largely diverted from current developments in Namibia at the time of the country's independence; this was true to an even greater degree for the issue of engaging the shared colonial past.

In Namibia, on the other hand, it seems that precisely such engagement became possible and also urgent once independence had been achieved. Once colonialism had been overcome at least in immediate political terms, the field seemed open to address issues of the past that had been repressed for a long time. In 1995, at an occasion related to occurrences under South African rule, a casual remark may have summed up such sentiments: 'Now Namibians are doing what they wanted to do for a long time'.¹ The occasion was the exhumation of *Kaptein* Diederik Ruben Goliath of Berseba, who had been exiled to Hoachanas in 1938 and died there in 1945. Now his remains were brought back to his native place. Some Namibians obviously saw a need and an urge to literally dig up the past.

Similarly, it has been argued that Ovaherero only at this point had a real chance to articulate their grievances rooted in the genocide. Even though this related to events that at independence were removed by almost a century, colonial rule had blocked not remembrance, but possibilities of articulating such remembrance freely and adequately. These concerns could only be voiced once confrontation by colonial rule no longer blocked such avenues, and the concerns included the claim for an apology and consequent reparation (Melber 2014a: 157; Katjavivi 2010; Harring 2002: 409), and also forms of legal action (Paech 2004: 17).

At the same time, these initiatives may be seen as a continuation of efforts by Ovaherero to re-establish themselves in the aftermath of the genocide and particularly under South African rule (Harring 2002: 402–3; 2007: 441–2; see ch. 7). In 1946, Friedrich Maharero

1 Personal observation, Hoachanas, June 2, 1995, cf. Kössler 2004b, 2005b: 173–4.

had made an attempt to lay claims for redress to the United Nations (Harring 2007: 437), obviously in the context of early engagement with the new world organisation around the South African incorporation attempt. By the 1990s, however, public debate and legal developments on various levels, not least in international law, shifted significantly. This shift was brought about decisively by West Germany's accession to its responsibility to recompense the Jews in the Holocaust, at least in material terms, and in particular for the victimisation. The succession of claims by further victim groups of Nazi crimes had also helped to change the conditions under which claims concerning the genocide in German South West Africa could be pursued.² More recently, this situation is also evident in court cases where victim groups in Greece and Italy have laid claims against the German state for atrocities which the army wing of the Nazi party (SS), as well as the regular army, had committed during the occupation of these countries in World War II. These issues are as yet not resolved.³ Further broadly comparable cases of reparation for state sponsored crimes and grave injustice are compensations for Japanese–Americans and Japanese–Canadians who had been summarily herded into camps during World War II (Harring 2002: 405; 2007: 443).

The first in Namibia to articulate claims towards German representatives were Ovaherero. If other groups remained silent at first, this does not imply that colonial atrocities and sufferings had been forgotten or completely repressed from memory. As we have seen in part from the preceding chapters, knowledge about the colonial genocide has been transmitted over the decades among affected communities. This trans-generational handing down of knowledge mainly took the form of oral accounts, traditional songs, and performances in the communal commemorations that came to serve the important purpose of asserting the history of the various communities, while making sure at the same time that remembrance would be preserved with the coming generations. By this, circumstances were created that may have hindered the clear articulation of grievances connected with the colonial past within a broader public arena.

Since the 1970s, in the context of a burgeoning liberation movement, these commemorative rituals were drawn increasingly into emerging party politics. These were marked by the branching out and splitting up of the independence movement. SWAPO, as well as other, far less successful groups, opted for armed struggle and adopted a language and programme of radical liberation. On the other hand, an array of groups and organisations that also stemmed from the independence movement in the 1950s and early 1960s opted for a strategy where they tried to avail themselves of the rather restrictive openings connected to the Turnhalle process. This was true in particular for leading Ovaherero around Clemens Kapuuo, apparently not least in an effort to avoid armed struggle which brought back

2 cf. Sarkin 2008: 4; Jeremy Sarkin, a law professor at the University of Cape Town, acted as a Legal Advisor to the late Ovaherero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako and thus was instrumental in drawing up the court papers for the Ovaherero lawsuit to be detailed below. He also appeared several times as a speaker at Herero Day.

3 cf. Paech 2004: 20–2; German courts did not honour these decisions, and they denied any liability of the German state to individuals. Visits by German President Joachim Gauck to Italy and Greece in 2013 and 2014 demonstrated that these issues remain unresolved; see also the Conclusion.

memories and experiences of the Namibian War. At the time, Kapuuu referred to the specific experience of the southern and central regions (Gewald 2004: 562, 564).

Regarding the genocide, pronouncements that may be gauged from the early 1960s appear cautious and low-key. Thus, on the occasion of Herero Day, 1960, it had been stated that 'the Herero never carry a war grudge since they believe there will be an end to their defeat'.⁴ Four years later, Clemens Kapuuu came out strongly against the 'battle at the Waterberg' commemoration staged by German speakers along with other whites, but he also stressed the will 'to forget the past . . . and have good relations with all sections of the population, but good relations cannot exist if some people try to remind us of the bad past'.⁵ In other words, Kapuuu here argued against the German dominated commemoration in the interests of jointly laying the past to rest. Once the DTA had been formed in the mid-1970s as an alliance of ethnically framed parties including NUDO, the Waterberg commemoration became a venue to symbolise the idea of a common cause between 'conservative Germans' and 'Herero willing to co-operate' in joint opposition to SWAPO (Förster 2010: 217, 220–31). At least on the part of Ovaherero sections that adhered to the DTA, reference to the genocide was hardly as open during these years as it was to become after Namibian independence in 1990. The institution of Ohamakari Day as a distinctly Ovaherero form of commemorating the battle of 1904 and the genocide, in contradistinction to the German dominated Waterberg commemoration, does not seem to have really taken root before 1990.⁶

If independence marked a time when it became possible for Namibians to address the dire past in more open and more active ways than had been the case under colonialism, such initiatives still were by no means universal. For a considerable time, the Namibian Government dissociated itself from such endeavours. After reaching independence in the wake of a protracted liberation war and pervasive confrontation throughout Namibian society, the interrelated quests for national unity and national reconciliation took precedence over many other considerations, and above all over what might be considered as merely sectional concerns.

Thus, the fear that reparations addressed to particular affected communities might foster tribalist cleavages was related to serious risks of engendering conflict.⁷ The universal invocation of reconciliation implied a strong tendency to refrain from addressing conflicts of the past. In the first place, this was related to a clear decision against any type of formal engagement with wrongs committed by any of the actors in the liberation war. In this understanding, reconciliation was predicated on blanket amnesty and repeated refusals to countenance anything resembling the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that got under way a few years after Namibian independence in neighbouring South Africa (Hunter 2008a: ch. VII, 185, 2010: 410–9).

4 *South West News/Suidwes Nuus*, 3.9.1960 (see Henrichsen 1997).

5 *The Windhoek Advertiser*, 7.8.1964, as quoted in Förster 2010: 205.

6 In any case, it has 'hardly been documented' (Förster 2010: 253).

7 It should be noted that claims for reparations have for a long time addressed this issue and mapped out ways to circumvent such risks.

Under such circumstances, and facing considerable pressure to address particularly human rights violations during the liberation war, it would have been difficult for the Namibian Government to push at the same time for a serious engagement of the German Government with the colonial genocide that dated some eight decades earlier. A further consideration stems from the considerable development aid Namibia has been receiving from Germany since attaining independence. Those advocating the request of a German apology, therefore, were required to perform a difficult balancing act in terms of diplomatic relations between the two countries (Katjavivi 2014).

By and large, initiatives to bring the issue of the colonial genocide into the public arena, then, were limited to representatives of certain ethnic groups, above all to Ovaherero.⁸ Notably, representatives of other groups, including Nama, came to the fore much later, effectively only after the centennial commemorations of 2004.

The problems that have marked efforts to claim apology and reparation ever since became more apparent in the mid-1990s. This period stands out as the only time when high-ranking German representatives such as head of state and head of government visited Namibia.⁹ Chancellor Helmut Kohl paid a state visit in 1995, and President Roman Herzog followed in 1998. In 1995, Ovaherero staged a demonstration in Windhoek's Independence Avenue with the intention of petitioning Kohl. This move included a claim for 600 million U.S. dollars as compensation for about 60,000 Ovaherero thought to have perished in the genocide (cf. Harring 2002: 394, 409). The Chancellor was not even prepared to receive the delegation. Instead, he greeted a gathering of German speakers as 'my dear compatriots' and dwelt on the special achievements of the German speakers in developing Namibia.

President Herzog showed more concern about the future of the German language in Namibia than preparation to countenance the colonial past. His remarks on language policy drew criticism for meddling in Namibia's internal affairs. The German President agreed to meet Ovaherero representatives only on an informal level, outside the official protocol. Herzog refused to apologise for the colonial genocide and denied there were judicial grounds for material reparations. Even though he conceded German soldiers had acted 'incorrectly', he claimed that it was by now too late for an apology (Sarkin 2004: 92). Moreover, Herzog, a renowned legal scholar and former President of the German Constitutional Court, argued that there had been no applicable international legislation at the time of the genocide. Another legal scholar has described such a claim as 'disingenuous. No laws existed at the time of the Holocaust that required reparations either. Rather, the weight of world opinion and changes in human rights law made such reparations politically necessary' (Harring 2002: 40691). Directly opposing Herzog, Ovaherero spokesman Mburumba Kerina pointed out that the Hague Convention of 1899 outlawed reprisals against civilians on the losing side of a war (Grobler 1998). In important ways, this exchange set the stage for the subsequent process.

As Harring (2002: 406–8) argues, denial of a basis for reparation claims in terms of international law is tantamount to claiming legality for colonialism. By 1900 such claims

8 Cf. especially Melber 2008, also for the following considerations; also Harring 2007: 446–9.

9 See for the following the overviews in Melber 2008: 266–7; Böhlke-Itzen 2004: 30–1.

had become an established fundamental tenet of international legal reasoning. Inevitably, such reasoning was based on stark and systematic discrimination of colonised peoples and even of states not deemed to be included in a self-appointed 'family of nations' (Kleinschmidt 2013). As Harring (2002: 407) concludes, the official German claim that there is no legal basis for reparations therefore simply rehearses colonialist argument (see *infra*).

Taking into account such considerations, German official actions as well as inaction inevitably implied serious provocation for Namibians seeking a hearing for their grievances regarding German colonialism. Ovaherero advances for presenting their grievances to the German head of government were rebuffed; at the same time, the Chancellor identified his stance with that of German speakers in Namibia, arguably the most obstinate and socially exclusive group of settlers, who in economic terms enjoy a position of disproportionate privilege.¹⁰ The Namibian Government saw serious risks in potential reparations, since major benefits for specific population groups by Germany might impinge on only recently secured national unity and sovereignty. Since, due to regional diversity and population distribution, and that only a minority of Namibians living today form part of the victim groups,¹¹ there was concern that such reparations might engender tribalism and also that the government's planning authority might be called into question. Such arguments were in turn taken up by the German Government to justify its own approach (Melber 2008: 269). This approach basically relied on the declaration of a 'special responsibility' in the *Bundestag* resolution of 1989. A further argument to support the refusal of reparation claims consists in pointing to the high rate of German development cooperation with Namibia, which then is claimed as proof that Germany is indeed honouring her 'special responsibility'.¹²

The lawsuit

The decision of a specially formed body, the Herero People's Reparations Corporation (HPRC), to go ahead with a court case in the United States in 2001, can be understood as a consequence of frustrating and discriminatory treatment, most conspicuously that meted out by two of the highest representatives of the German state. In addition, an earlier attempt to sue the German Federal Government and three German enterprises at the International Court of Justice in The Hague had failed. The court considered the case inadmissible on the grounds of the generally accepted immunity of states, where states cannot be sentenced by a foreign court (Böhlke-Itzen 2004: 31). State immunity also forms one of the main obstacles to pursuing crimes committed and damages caused by the military, including

10 Kohl's words also disowned his own ambassadors who had made efforts to drive home the difference between Germans and German speaking Namibians, see ch. 4.

11 In particular in recent statements, this demographic structure is seen by victim groups as a consequence of the genocide itself.

12 This is also evident from the latest exchange. See *Deutscher Bundestag. – 17. Wahlperiode. – 162. Sitzung. Berlin, Donnerstag, den 1. März 2012*, pp. 19354–19357 (Hartwig Fischer, Wolfgang Götzer, both CDU/CSU; Marina Schuster, FDP; all speeches were put on record without oral delivery). On 'special responsibility', see the closing section of ch. 2.

various cases of litigation around atrocities committed by German troops during World War II in southern Europe.¹³

Under such circumstances, the specifics of the United States legal system, in particular the ATCA, seemed to offer the best chance of a successful lawsuit. This was especially the case against a backdrop of recent legal developments that tended to view claims for reparations more favourably than before. While there was little hope of dislodging the obstacle of state immunity in this way, the ATCA allows for the suing of non-state perpetrators even for acts committed outside the United States. Also, at the time when the HPRC took legal action, there had been a number of cases filed in the United States, mainly though not exclusively under the ATCA, and superannuation appeared not to be an insurmountable obstacle (Sarkin 2004: 73–88). The legal case pursued under the ATCA by former World War II forced labourers from Eastern Europe had just been settled out of court and offered obvious parallels and hints for the Ovaherero concern (Harring 2002: 393–4). The HPRC therefore filed a lawsuit against both the German state and three German companies which could be construed as successors of companies active in Namibia during the genocide. Given the technical legal difficulties of suing states, the case against the German state was dropped eventually; however, the cases against Deutsche Bank, Terex (incorporating Orenstein-Koppel) and Deutsche Afrika-Linien aka Woermann-Linie were pursued (Harring 2002: 90–1). The lawsuit was filed in the names of ‘the Hereros, a tribe and ethnic and racial group, by and through its Paramount Chief, by Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako’ (HPRC 2001: 1), as well as of a large number of individual plaintiffs (Harring 2002: 1–20).

The submission recapitulated both broad Ovaherero history and the genocide committed in the course of the Namibian War (cf. ch. 1). It claimed a clear connection of this mass crime to the Holocaust (cf. ch. 3), but – as remarked by one analyst – left out reference to other colonial wars by Germany or other powers (Krüger 2003: 135). The submission substantiated the following main indictments against the German colonial power as well as against the business companies that were held accountable since they had cooperated with the colonial authorities:

- (a) initiation of and implementation of a race war against the Hereros;
 - (b) initiation of and implementation of an implicit and explicit campaign of genocide, extermination and extirpation of the Hereros;
 - (c) the brutalisation and enslavement of the Hereros, and the systematic use of forced labour;
 - (d) the systematic forced degradation of Herero women held as captives; and
 - (e) the systematic destruction of Herero culture.
- (HPRC 2001: 61).

13 cf. Paech 2004: 17–9; in October 2014, the Italian Constitutional Court ruled that Italian Nazi victims were entitled to sue the German state. The German government immediately turned to the International Court of Justice in The Hague to insist on the established principle of state immunity; see SZ 23.10.2014.

Up to the time of writing, the plaintiffs have not succeeded in finding a United States court which was prepared to take up their case. The judicial merits of the lawsuit have therefore not been evaluated (Sarkin 2008: 153–4). Assertions that this lack of success disproves any of the claims made in the legal supposition are therefore without foundation, even in formal legal terms. As becomes clear from the trajectory of the issue during the 1990s, such legal action was only one of the remedies that were sought when the quest for a hearing and adequate response fell on deaf ears of the German officials. As has been observed, the lawsuit pursued a political claim.

Given the malleability and largely customary character of international law, this strong political dimension should not come as a surprise (Harring 2002: 410). The more important issue concerns the application of norms to the genocide committed in Namibia that have been recognised and established in other contexts, but are here apparently denied to plaintiffs, e.g. in submissions such as that to former President Herzog. The Hague Convention referred to by Mburumba Kerina in his representation to Herzog constitutes an important advance in norms governing the law that is supposed to pertain in war (*ius in bello*). The Convention ostensibly hems in violence and protects non-combatants and prisoners of war. These norms had been agreed upon by European powers among themselves. However, by this very token, the protective norms were not conceptualised or planned to apply to all humans, but only in wars involving sovereign states. The notion of sovereignty, along with recognition as a legitimate belligerent, that is the right to wage war in terms of international law (*ius ad bellum*), was constricted progressively in the course of the 19th Century to cover almost exclusively western states. Consequently, all colonised people were automatically excluded from the legal protection accorded through the Hague Conventions. This turnabout in legal theory was precisely the result of systematic discrimination against non-Europeans. One consequence consisted in the open abrogation of existing treaties with states that formerly had been treated as sovereign entities but subsequently were stripped of this status by unilateral decisions of colonial powers, along with their right to be considered legitimate belligerents (Kleinschmidt 2013). From a postcolonial perspective, one may argue that the provincial and skewed character of international law (Dhawan 2010; Kaapanda-Girnus 2010) was in this way intensified or strictly speaking, even constituted only at this stage.

There is a further strand to this issue. It concerns not the general applicability of *ius in bello*, (legal rules governing behaviour during war and in particular the treatment of non-combatants and prisoners of war), but the recognition that was implied in the negotiation and signing of protection treaties between the German Empire and traditional leaders in Namibia. As Malte Jaguttis (2005, 2010) in particular has argued, one should also look at the ways the protection treaties between the various chiefs in Namibia and German plenipotentiaries were negotiated. If such processes demonstrate that the German negotiators treated their African counterparts as sovereigns, these negotiations and treaty acts would imply that international law which pertained at the time between such sovereigns was valid and applicable during the Namibian War. This line of reasoning would then lead to the

conclusion that the protective norms of the Hague Convention were not only violated in material ways by the *Schutztruppe*, but also formally, as legal norms that pertained to the conflict at hand. In this way, the German Empire formally broke existing international law even in the restricted understanding that prevailed at the time. The official German claim that relevant legal provisions indicting genocide had not been in place from 1904–08 would thereby be rendered insubstantial.

As discussed in chapter 3, the HPRC motivated its case differently. A postcolonial argument was pursued, linked to systematic reference to the Holocaust (cf. esp. Haring 2002, 2007). Here it is pointed out that the principle upon which compensation was paid to Jewish institutions by West Germany should also apply to victims of the genocide in Namibia. As Haring insists, the HPRC case resonates in particular with the claims for Jewish victims of the Holocaust, but also with other cases connected with World War II (2007: 443). As the same author also observed (2002: 404–5), various claims for compensation by World War II victim groups were eventually settled out of court, which underscores the importance that needs to be accorded to the political dimension of these legal proceedings. Political considerations have been decisive in practically every case.

Arguably, the law suit had two important side effects: On the one hand, the claim amounting to a sum of two billion US dollars highlighted the weight of potential follow-ups should the claim be upheld in a court of law and therefore, should the case serve as legal precedent. A large range of further colonial atrocities has been mentioned in this respect at various occasions such as the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001. These cases include the atrocities in the Congo Free State, viz. Belgian Congo that occurred roughly at the same time as the genocide in Namibia, but also crimes falling under the responsibility of virtually all the European colonial powers of the 19th and 20th Centuries. Truly, this may be termed a potential 'Pandora's box' (Sarkin 2008: 155). Subsequent official German behaviour certainly is to be seen within this broader perspective.

The other important aspect of the law case, as presented in 2001 and during subsequent years, pertained to ethnic politics involved in bringing forth claims and concerns of victim groups in Namibia. The entire legal action was aimed clearly and solely at Ovaherero concerns. Plaintiffs named besides the HPRC were explicitly 'the Hereros' (HPRC 2001: 1); furthermore, it was asserted that 'the class of Plaintiffs is or will be comprised of all members of the Herero tribe' (HPRC 2001: 63). There was no mention or even notion that suffering and damages went beyond this ethnic group.

Nor was this an accident. Arguably in most academic writing and certainly in the prevailing tenor of popular discourse and publishing, the genocide was seen as a 'Herero genocide' first and foremost, and to a large extent exclusively. For a certain period, including the centennial year of 2004, this found expression in forms of ethnically defined Ovaherero exclusivism in the discourse around the genocide (Melber 2005b, 2014a). On the other hand, this exclusivism, which in 2004 was evident at the central Ohamakari commemoration (cf. ch 11), set into motion a process of victim competition,¹⁴ with risks of serious polarisation as

¹⁴ This concept has been set out with reference to the memorialisation of the Holocaust by Chaumont 1997.

a consequence of forcefully voiced claims for 'sole victimhood'.¹⁵ As we shall see, alignments within Namibia were to change later in important ways.

RESPONSES TO LEGAL ACTION

The immediate impact of the lawsuit, as it evolved up to the centennial year of 2004, was considerable. At the World Conference against Racism in Durban 2001, the issue of reparations dovetailed with the more encompassing demands for coming to terms with the heritage of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Whereas German Foreign Minister Joseph Fischer¹⁶ seemed ready to accede at least to stating injustice on such counts (Sarkin 2008: 133), pressure on the issue of the Namibian genocide (Böhlke-Itzen 2004: 103) turned out to be ineffective. Fischer proved adamant where German concrete responsibility was concerned. Thus, while visiting Windhoek in October 2003, he went on record with an acknowledgement of 'our historical responsibility', yet he stressed at the same time that 'we are not hostages to history' and 'therefore, there will be no apology with relevance for compensation' (AZ 30.10.2003). Of course, this amounted to a denial of responsibility in practical terms. Moreover, the argument against being hostage to history clearly smacks of the final stroke discourse. This is remarkable, particularly since in different contexts, Fischer repudiated such an attitude emphatically with reference to the Holocaust. Thus, some four and a half years earlier, he had justified German participation in the Kosovo War in 1999 – which was illegal in terms of international law – by reference to an obligation to prevent a repetition of Auschwitz.¹⁷

In all likelihood, such apparent contradiction reflected a fear of doing exactly what Fischer had excluded as a course of action in Windhoek: Any explicit reference to the genocide might be construed as a basis for effective legal action to secure reparations. It seems that this fear has informed the way successive German governments of diverse party political hues have dealt with the genocide issue ever since (see also chapters 11 & 12). This approach also set the tone for the official German treatment of the genocide and related issues during the centennial year of 2004.

15 Melber 2005b: 109; from today's vantage point, these forebodings have not come true.

16 As a conventional politician, Fischer should be addressed by his proper name and not by the diminutive he has adopted in public life as a former activist, even though 'Joschka' as his first name has been retained even in official documents.

17 Fischer, Joschka: *Rede des Außenministers zum Natoeinsatz im Kosovo* [at the Extraordinary Congress of the Green Party, Bielefeld, 13.5.1999]; Heinrich Böll Stiftung. *Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis*. Hanover 1999. The speech is available (audiofile) on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jsKCOTM4Ms>; text file: <http://staff-www.uni-marburg.de/~naeser/kos-fisc.htm>; accessed 12.5.2015; Fischer considered this the most important speech of his life (as quoted in *Focus* magazine, 12.4.2008; http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/tid-9524/joschka-fischer-wird-60-bombenkrieg-im-kosovo-farbbeutel-in-bielefeld_aid_269162.html; accessed 3.4.2013).

In particular the centenary of the onset of the Ovaherero–German war in January 2004 was marked by news coverage and media features in Germany that are rare for topics relating to Namibia, and an array of civil society activities as well as semi-official events took place (Zeller 2005a). In this way, a certain amount of public momentum built up, which may have contributed to the decision by the two parliamentary parties, the Social Democrats and the Greens, who at that time formed the governing coalition, to introduce a motion into the *Bundestag* that addressed the centenary.

This motion, entitled ‘In Commemoration of the Victims of the Colonial War in Erstwhile German South West Africa’, was passed on 17 June 2004.¹⁸ The resolution reaffirmed Germany’s recognition of a ‘special responsibility’ in relation to Namibia. In contradistinction to the resolution of 1989, this time, the reasons for such responsibility were specified by reference to the ‘victims from the Herero and Nama population’ and the *Bundestag* expressed its ‘deep regret and mourning in relation to the African peoples’. However, apart from mentioning the death of ‘large parts of the peoples of the Herero and Nama,’ the resolution did not specify what actually had happened in Namibia, nor did it spell out implications of the ‘special responsibility’ which it re-affirmed and linked to a general concern for land reform. As emerged from the plenary debate before the resolution was passed, supporters of the resolution considered this responsibility to be mainly honoured by the high per capita rate of German development cooperation with Namibia. In this way, it also remained quite unclear and unspecified what was meant by the *Bundestag*’s intention, as noted in the closing sentence of the resolution, to ‘contribute towards restoring to the tens of thousands of victims their dignity and honour’.

One may well ponder the question of who had the right or powers to deprive victims of honour and dignity in the first place, and who would be entitled to restore such qualities to them a hundred years later. It may well be argued that it is the perpetrators of crimes against humanity who, by such very acts, forego their honour, if not their dignity. The victims certainly undergo suffering and also degrading treatment. Yet regardless of a widely accepted way of thinking, it would seem too much to accord to the criminal perpetrators, besides their obvious physical domination over the victims, the right and power to decide on issues of honour and dignity. In this case, the language of ‘honour and dignity’ employed here by the *Bundestag* – as it corresponds indeed to almost routine parlance in comparable contexts – would actually, even though without clear intention, perpetuate and reciprocate the violent relationship that has been established by the criminal acts of the perpetrators and implicitly ascertain their claims to superiority. It is only from such a position of superiority that anyone can decide on another person’s, or a collective, ‘honour and dignity’. Therefore, this is a far cry from the language of reconciliation that would require those in the perpetrator position – in this case, the highest representatives of the German state and the German people – to ask forgiveness rather than to don the mantle of dispensing ‘honour and dignity’.

18 Cf. *Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 15/3329 (Zum Gedenken an die Opfer des Kolonialkrieges im damaligen Deutsch-Südwestafrika); Plenarprotokoll 15/114 17.06.2004 pp. 10424 B–10429 B.*

Above all, the resolution, while underlining a commitment to Namibia in general terms, skirted the vital issue of openly addressing the genocide. As can be said also with hindsight, the text reflected an intricate array of contradictory and countervailing forces, both within the government and on the parliamentary floor. As stated earlier, considerable pressure was exerted on the draft of the resolution during the committee phase, in particular from the Foreign Office. Such pressure concerned especially the issue of genocide. Arguments resonated with those of the denialist camp, when it was claimed that the conclusion that a genocide had been perpetrated in Namibia was not prevailing scholarly opinion but merely one side within an inconclusive controversy. It was claimed that the view of the *Schutztruppe* campaign as genocide rested on 'factually very contested conclusions of individual historians' (as quoted in *taz* 29./30.6.2004). As proof of this, officials apparently invoked rightist author Claus Nordbruch (see ch. 5); in fact, such assertions are not basically different from public claims about an 'Auschwitz lie', which in German law constitutes a criminal offence (Melchers 2004). Remarkably, such arguments then emanated from the German Foreign Office, at the time under the responsibility of a widely acclaimed minister from the Green Party.

During the plenary debate, the hecatombs of dead were not contested as such; however, speakers from the conservative (CDU) and liberal (FDP) parties asserted that the blocking off of the Omaheke merely meant 'assenting collusion' with a 'humanitarian catastrophe' – which then appeared as something of a natural disaster. On such grounds, the two parties above, which then formed the opposition, chose to abstain from voting on the motion. On the other hand, one of the promoters of the resolution, Hans-Christian Ströbele (Greens) acknowledged that he had 'hoped for a different motion' and mentioned both the war of extinction and its connection with the current land situation in central and southern Namibia. When put to task about this more than seven years later at a public panel discussion, Ströbele confirmed that he had been under massive pressure, and the text had been the result of an uneasy compromise.¹⁹

The concerned groups in Namibia were devastated at the resulting resolution. The Ovaherero Chiefs' secretariat in Windhoek called the resolution a 'provocation' and a caricature of true reconciliation (*TN* 28.6.2004; also Zaire 2004). Ovaherero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako bemoaned the silence of the resolution in regard to Trotha's annihilation proclamation (*taz* 26.6.2004). Former Namibian Attorney General Vekuii Rukoro saw racist discrimination in the differential treatment accorded to victims of German genocides in the 20th Century (*TN* 9.7.2004). Namibian opposition parties – Congress of Democrats and Democratic Turnhalle Alliance – also rejected the *Bundestag* resolution. The Foreign Ministry in Windhoek declined comment, and SWAPO as the ruling party kept silent about the issue (*taz* 26.6.2004).

For such reasons, the situation was tense between Namibia and Germany during the run-up to the central event of the memorial year, the anniversary of the battle of Ohamakarari, which was commemorated on August 14. This tension became apparent during a panel

¹⁹ Panel discussion, Berlin, *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, 28. 9. 2011; own observation.

discussion²⁰ in which the German Ambassador to Namibia, Wolfgang Massing, took part. Earlier in 2004, Massing had shown some willingness to join in memorial activities. In particular, he had been present in Okahandja, when the centenary of the beginning of the Ovaherero–German War had been marked on January 11. At this occasion, the Namibian Government had not been represented. At the panel discussion, however, the Ambassador apparently felt too pressed about the intertwined issues of genocide, apology and reparations. Referring to reparations, he shouted at the large, predominantly Ovaherero audience from the podium: ‘Forget about it! Forget about it!’

This rather undiplomatic episode underlined the chasm that was apparent at the time between the official line taken by the German Government and its diplomats on the one hand and widespread popular sentiment among Namibians on the other. People’s sentiments became evident in a number of ways. Cars were adorned with the posters put out by the National Archives of Namibia, calling for each and sundry who had recollections about or objects relating to the Namibian War to come forward and to share them. The group of young male Ovaherero in iron chains and shackles shown on this poster became a sort of emblematic sign for the genocide and the commemoration activities. T-shirts were also worn with inscriptions that referred to the genocide. Small black sashes, shaped in similar form to the red ones distributed in solidarity with HIV/AIDS victims, were sold and worn as a sign of mourning, commemorating those who had died in the genocide.

Another testimony to the considerable commitment and concern the anniversary elicited was a self-styled exhibition at the Ovaherero Kommando in Katutura (see ch. 1). Beyond the view of mainstream public attention, this experience demonstrated first the difficulties in finding adequate means and forms to deal with a dire past, as people were very slow in responding to the call to bring forward exhibits; however, once this spell had been broken, there was considerable commitment and even enthusiasm. The spread of the theme of genocide also took forms that at first may appear disconcerting, such as the beauty contests for ‘Mother Genocide’ and ‘Miss Genocide’. In this way, the term ‘genocide’ was appropriated into vernacular culture. By integrating the term into secular rituals such as beauty contests, the register of a message was added that went beyond commemoration of the mass murder and mourning. In a ‘celebration of survival’ (Förster 2010: 309; 2008b), this practice resonated with the attitude, quoted above, that for Ovaherero, ‘there will be an end to their defeat’.²¹

In all these ways, unmistakable tension was apparent. There was a remarkable degree of mobilisation and activity concerning the genocide and the centenary of the Namibian War. In 2004, this related above all to groups and bodies rooted in Ovaherero traditional communities. Besides this, there were activities by wider sections of civil society in Namibia, but also in Germany the number and density of activities came as a surprise to many (Zeller 2005a). This differed clearly from the roles played by the German as well as the Namibian governments and states. Whereas German official interventions, in particular the

20 Author’s observation, Windhoek, 4.8.2004.

21 *South West News/Suidwes Nuus*, 3.9.1960 (see Henrichsen 1997).

Bundestag resolution, appeared far too little forthcoming and even an outright provocation, the Namibian Government kept a very low profile during the first half of 2004.

In the following chapters, we follow and examine the trajectories of these stances and attitudes as they took some surprising twists during and after the Ohamakarri commemoration in 2004. We also see decisive issues and blockades in dealing with the genocide and its memory that persist to the present.

11

Half an Apology – Political Re-Alignments

WHEN GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER FISCHER WENT ON RECORD IN WINDHOEK THAT THERE would not be an apology that might give grounds for reparations, his words were blunt and not very diplomatic. One might even have called the statement uncouth. However, this pronouncement set the tone for much of what was to come in Namibian–German memory politics during the ensuing months and years – even though these developments were not without their sudden and surprising turns. The most celebrated of these turns was the speech of then German Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul. She delivered it at the largest and most prominent commemoration during the centennial year of 2004, at Ohamakari on August 14, an occasion to mark the fateful battle of August 11, 1904. The apology for the colonial genocide that she ostensibly offered on this occasion was taken as a promising new opening by many. However, as this and the following chapter will demonstrate, many of those who pinned their hopes on this and other pronouncements and actions by German official representatives soon found such new vistas limited. This limitation was precisely due to Fischer's prescription excluding anything near an apology, in wording or substance, which even in the remotest sense might entail claims for material redress and reparation. New and to some extent even unexpected developments followed. Important actors changed their attitudes, or their tactics, while new alliances were forged. Such change came from civil society groups and organisations in both countries, and later also from the Namibian Government and SWAPO as the ruling party. Still, these actors were by no means uniform. Rather, at various stages tension and conflict were evident.

This chapter will start out from the central events during the centennial year of 2004. Arguably these events set the stage for endeavours and responses throughout the ensuing decade. I link an account of a few features of the memorial year with an outline of the actors and their relationships, as they were vital to the articulation of widespread concern with

traumatic colonial heritage. After this, I take a closer look at Wiczorek-Zeul's much debated speech. The inherent contradictions of this seminal intervention lead up to how, both in Germany and Namibia, collective actors formed and realigned in response to the inconclusive and deeply unsatisfactory way German officialdom had related to the colonial legacy of the German state. A review of these actor constellations around this festering issue then leads us to the latest developments in our story, which coalesced in the emblematic and deeply emotional issue of repatriation of human remains to Namibia, the subject of my closing chapter.

SKIRTING THE G-WORD: THE GERMAN OFFICIAL RESPONSE

One of the main issues that structured the conflict-ridden process of commemorating the colonial genocide in Namibia was and is the official German stance. With sometimes astonishing consistency and tenacity this stance prevents any treatment of the issue of genocide in a clear and unequivocal way. Despite considerable changes and dramatic turns, the refusal has prevailed to state what has been perpetrated in the German name, in a manner which many Namibians would see as a clear and open admission of responsibility. This problem can be traced in Wiczorek-Zeul's speech and also in subsequent initiatives from the German side.

Namibian centennial activities and German responses

The centennial commemoration at Ohamakari on August 14, 2004 was the central and pivotal event in a string of memorial activities that took place in both countries throughout the course of that year. In Namibia, the event took its place within a succession of activities that related to a chronological sequence of dates connected to what had happened in 1904. In particular, reference was made to military engagements and battles. Highlights were the centennial of the beginning of the war, commemorated on January 10 in Okahandja. After the climax of August 14 at Ohamakari, the commemoration at Ozombu zOvindimba on October 2 stood out, marking the place and date of Trotha's extermination proclamation.

In a way that was similar to some of the preceding events, the basic set-up of the day-long commemoration reciprocated the pattern of *omazemburukiro* held by Ovaherero at various places in central Namibia (see ch. 8). At the same time, the commemoration of 2004 took up, on a much grander scale, the tradition of Ohamakari Day that had been observed for some time mainly by local inhabitants in the Okakarara area which more or less borders the historic battle site. The elevated position of the Ohamakari commemoration in symbolic, and thereby also in political terms, was articulated in a number of the goals pursued and constraints experienced by the actors.

To begin with, the site of the event carried its own pitfalls, and in a way, it also symbolises the persistent impact of the Namibian War and the genocide. The modern farm of Great Hamakari, owned by the German speaking Diekmann family, lies at the eastern fringe of the

large block of farms around the Waterberg, many of these still owned by German speakers. Privileged by very good water conditions and grazing, the area was one of the most attractive in Namibia to settlers once the resident Ovaherero had been expropriated and at least temporarily removed. After their return, in particular members of the chiefly Kambazembi family entered into relations with these farmers. These relationships were characterised by a measure of mutual benefit, even though the Ovaherero side clearly found themselves in a subaltern position.¹ Eventually, the largest 'Herero' reserve was established adjacent to the Waterberg farms, and the present town of Okakarara became the main settlement of this reserve. As Förster (2010: 109) reports, the line which at present separates the commercial from the communal farmland still has great relevance to the ways in which the events of 1904 are memorialised on both sides of this divide.

What eventually became the site where the commemoration was held was prepared by a German funded initiative which created the Okakarara Community Cultural and Tourism Centre (OCCTC). This centre was aimed at income generation, and also youth exchange and intercultural understanding, and it involved the expenditure of some €540,000.² Apart from an administrative building and later an exhibition hall, a stage-like structure was erected on the extensive grounds. This stage could be used for cultural enactments and serve as a rostrum and V.I.P. stand, which was the case at the event of August 2004. This commemoration was linked to an official opening ceremony of this centre by the German Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, who in additional ways assumed a central role in the day's proceedings.

The centre's location, approximately three kilometres outside Okakarara on the tar road, but otherwise in more or less open country, would be considered inconvenient apart from its symbolic significance as part of the general 'region of combat' in 1904 (Förster 2010: 290). More specifically, the site directly borders the farm of Great Hamakari, and this proved decisive for its selection as the spot where the commemoration was to be held. The organisers had envisaged staging the commemoration, as on previous occasions, on the farm itself. This plan led to prolonged negotiation with the farmer, Wilhelm Diekmann. Diekmann's conditions for allowing the commemoration to take place on his property included a warning against 'one-sided ceremonies' and 'one-sided accusations'.³ This public statement came at the end of a lengthy exchange of letters, and both the negotiations and the conditions the farmer sought to impose constituted clear reminders of the open and festering land question (Förster 2010: 286–90).

1 Some of this is reflected in Schneider-Waterberg 2011, see in particular images appearing on pp. 162–3.

2 cf. <http://hereroculture.jimdo.com/> (12.4.2013). Further online documentation is no longer workable: http://www.windhuk.diplo.de/de/presse/Seite__PM__27__02-2004.html; http://www.ded.de/cipp/ded/custom/pub/content_lang/oid1452/ticket_g_u_e_s_t; I also rely on my personal observation on August 13 and 14, 2004. AZ 10.6.2004 reports on the official introduction of DED cooperant Almut Hielscher and on an investment sum, as envisioned at the time, of € 180,000. On the later crisis the centre incurred, see Maritz 2005; thanks also to Almut Hielscher and Rolf-Henning Hintze for personal communication.

3 AZ, 13.1.2004; note that the website advertising the hunting and guest farm of Great Hamakari does not mention the historic battle, even though the website does contain a 'history' section, <http://www.hamakarihunting.com/d-history.htm> (accessed 25.10.2014).

Eventually, Diekmann came up with an alternative to holding the commemoration on his own farmland. He offered one hectare of land at the boundary of his farm where it borders the OCCTC. This should be dedicated to the erection of a memorial, an aim pursued by Ovaherero activists for several years. At the same time, the small piece of land provided the symbolic link of the OCCTC grounds to the farm of Great Hamakari as the main site of battle, and it would be accessible without passing through the rest of that farm (Förster 2010: 290–1).

Given this location, the main public event of 2004 digressed from the practice of Ohamakari Day, which had been held near Okakarara, but in 1993 at the waterhole that gave its name to the battle as well as to the present farm (Förster 2010: 248, 256–8). Such practice, intimately linked to the graves that are thought to exist there,⁴ hinged on the co-operation of the farmer. In 2004, corresponding activities by ritual specialists during the week before the commemoration were shielded from the public (Förster 2010: 293). The symbolic import of the location was given high consideration, including the unveiling of a provisional monument to Samuel Maharero on the small portion of land that had been detached from the adjacent commercial farm, but still carried the halo of this farm's name, referring to the battle site Ohamakari.

The run-up to the Ohamakari event was marked by intense conflict and controversy among concerned initiatives. In contradistinction to debates revolving around denialism (see ch. 5), the valuation of the past has never been at issue between these groups; nor is the demand contentious that the German Government must apologise and be liable to reparations or compensation. The pervasive reference to the genocide seemed to be commonly accepted knowledge, along with the joint call for an official apology by Germany, as a common programmatic stand. Existing conflicts reflect internal fissures and contradictions that exist among Ovaherero, and to a less publicised extent so far, also amongst Nama and Damara. In the Ovaherero case, the split revolves around the dualism between a genealogical legitimacy represented by the Five Royal Houses on the one hand, and a legitimacy that claims popular assent to life time appointment to the position of Paramount on the other. Cleavages are accentuated by party politics, with the Royal Houses aligning with SWAPO, while the late Paramount Chief Riruako had been a prominent member of the DTA, and also assumed ministerial posts during the 1980s. By 2004, Riruako's political stance had become even more pronounced, since in 2003 he had taken his party NUDO out of the DTA to pursue an independent candidacy in the general and presidential elections, later in 2004 (Bertout 2006: 81).

Initially, when preparations for the centennial year got under way during 2003, one might have expected that the demand directed at the German Government for a formal apology for the genocide might work as an overarching goal behind which everybody could unite. In this way, existing rifts could be bridged at least for the moment. However, as it turned out, existing contradictions and tensions could not be overcome conclusively on that basis.⁵

4 According to Förster 2010: 279–80, no specific graves of Ovaherero are known.

5 In various discussions with participants in both groups during August 2004, the reasons for the split remained opaque.

Thus, eventually two different preparatory committees were formed: one, the National Preparatory Committee for the Commemoration 2004 (NPCC04) brought together an array of actors and stakeholders, many of whom were from beyond the Ovaherero pale. For its large church-related constituency and the prominent role assumed by Bishop Zephania Kameeta of the ELCRN, and Bishop Reinhard Keding of the German Lutheran Church, the group was also known as the 'Bishops' Committee'. For the second group, the Genocide Commemoration Committee was formed, and they acted in the name of the Ovaherero Senate and by-and-large followed the line laid down by Paramount Chief Riruako. Riruako had taken prominent action before, initiating the court case in the United States under the ATCA (see ch. 10). Party politics are clearly enmeshed with this web of countervailing forces and interests, whether this refers to an actual or perceived linkage with SWAPO, the ruling party, or to Riruako's and NUDO's strategy of leaving the DTA.

The fissures that existed between the diverse memory initiatives came to the fore when at the commemorative event in Okahandja on January 11 and 12, 2004 (organised by the Genocide Committee to mark the centenary of the beginning of the Ovaherero–German War), no representative of the Namibian Government was present. However, as noted, the event was attended by German Ambassador Wolfgang Massing. The landscape in mid-2004, shortly before the most important date and commemoration on August 14, appeared rugged. Rifts divided not only Namibian and some German activists from the stance taken by the German Government and the *Bundestag*, but also the two committees active in Namibia. Ambassador Massing had shown willingness for a certain amount of symbolic action when he came forward to be present at important commemorations, but as mentioned, he had also articulated, in rather spontaneous and rude fashion, the limitations of his writ, which of course had been prescribed for him in Berlin.

Asking 'forgiveness for our trespasses': The Ohamakari event and Wieczorek-Zeul's speech

The intervention by Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul at Ohamakari needs to be understood against the above background. Her speech was surprising in its message to many if not most listeners on the spot. During the following years, this speech became a constant reference and topic of debate among concerned quarters. The speech therefore needs to be considered in some detail, but this must not obliterate the other aspects of what happened at Ohamakari. These features underlined forcefully the concerns that lie at the basis of Ovaherero memory politics.

Before the central event at Ohamakari on August 14, 2004, fences between the different players in Namibia were mended in order to enable a joint commemoration on the most important date during this year. Persistent difficulties were evident, for example, in a packed programme which obviously had to accommodate all relevant stakeholders and potential



Fig. 11.1 Re-enactment of chained Ovaherero prisoners at Ohamakari commemoration, August 14, 2004. Photograph: Namibia Media Holdings Archive.

allies.⁶ The programme allocated to each speaker, except the very prominent ones, an unrealistic five minutes inclusive of the mandatory translation back and forth between English and Otjiherero. To a considerable extent, the list of speakers reflected specific ways of relating to the historical occasion. This became particularly evident in the pompous entry of King Kauluma of Ondonga, the northern polity whose warriors had attacked Fort Namutoni in 1904. This act could be construed as assistance to the Ovaherero war effort, and after their defeat, Ovaherero refugees were welcomed in Ondonga. Moreover, Kauluma held the influential post of Chairperson of the Council of Traditional Leaders.

However, history did not lend itself easily to legitimate an alliance of the two ethnic groupings that had been at the forefront of the Namibian War, Ovaherero and Nama. While the Bondelswarts rising of October 1903 could be accommodated, in 1904 important Nama

⁶ The full programme appears in Sarkin 2008: 195–8. The following account is based on personal observation; see also Förster 2010: 278–86 for a full rendering of the event.

groups, in particular IKhowsen (Witbooi), not only stayed out of confrontation with the colonial power up to October 3, 1904, when the Nama–German War began, but lent their support to the German campaign, as stipulated by the various protection treaties. Such Witbooi auxiliaries had taken rather a prominent role at Ohamakari (Hillebrecht 2015: 49). It may not have been an accident that the only scheduled speaker from southern Namibia, *Onderkaptein* Christiaan Rooi of the IKhowsen⁷ eventually was not present at the Ohamakari event. However, one of the speakers was Raimar von Hase as representative of the German speaking community, who later became Chairman of the Namibia Agricultural Union. In the end, speakers vastly exceeded their allotted time; speeches lasted until well after nightfall and were delivered under a shining moon.

By location and on account of the composition of the huge audience, this was distinctly an Ovaherero event. The official programme, however, does not exhaust the significance of this gathering. With some five to ten thousand attendants, it brought together Ovaherero not only from Namibia but also from the diaspora in Botswana and South Africa. In this way, ties could be forged with descendants of people who had fled Namibia in 1904 and after, and who now claimed to experience their collective Ovaherero identity for the first time in their lives. Marching *oturupa*, charging horse riders, women and men in traditional dress figured prominently, as did the cardboard placards which many participants hung from their necks and on which the surnames of their German grandfathers and great-grandfathers were written as strong pointers to German responsibility (see ch. 4). The events of the Namibian War were also evoked by re-enactment, in its most spectacular form when a group of young men appeared on the festival grounds in heavy iron chains, to remind spectators of the plight of prisoners of war in the concentration camps a century earlier. By and large, the admonishment given before the event, to behave as would befit an event concerned above all with mourning the dead victims of the genocide, was reflected in the restrained and sombre comportment of the participants.

Wieczorek-Zeul was scheduled to speak at the beginning of the interventions by a number of particularly prominent speakers. In this way, speakers that followed, such as Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako and Minister of Lands, as well as SWAPO's presidential candidate and thus President-to-be Hifikipunye Pohamba, had the opportunity to immediately respond to what the German Minister said. These responses were important since they reflected the stunning impression the speech made on many if not on most listeners. The German Minister delivered her speech without the usual interruptions for interpreters; an Otjiherero version was read out after she had ended. She was clearly deeply moved, and her voice was close to choking several times. The Minister acknowledged that the crimes of the *Schutztruppe* and its leadership 'would today be called genocide'. She noted further that 'nowadays a General von Trotha would be persecuted and convicted'. Then followed the decisive sentences:

7 Since *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi had taken up a ministerial post at independence in 1990, Christiaan Rooi was *de facto* head of the Witbooi Traditional Authority and by that time also formally in the position of Acting *Kaptein*.

Fig. 11.2 German Ambassador Wolfgang Massing keeping an eye on German Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul at the centennial commemoration, Ohamakari, August 14, 2004. Photograph: Namibia Media Holdings Archive.



We Germans accept our historical and moral responsibility and guilt incurred by Germans at that time. And so, in the words of the Lord's Prayer that we share, I ask you to forgive us our trespasses and our guilt. Without a conscious process of remembering, without sorrow, without apology, there can be no reconciliation – remembrance is the key to reconciliation.⁸

The speech closed with an affirmation that 'Germany has learned the bitter lessons of history', was 'open to the world and has in many ways become multicultural'. The Minister also acknowledged the Namibian people's liberation struggle and the success achieved since independence.⁹

This was a far cry indeed from the *Bundestag* resolution passed barely two months earlier. The wording clearly struck the same chord as the prevailing discourse in Germany which rested on the assumption that active remembrance forms the basic legitimate approach towards dealing with a cruel past and mass crimes involved in it, and that these should never be forgotten. This commitment is linked to the expectation that such active engagement will engender reconciliation. Still, not everybody on the ground was satisfied. After the Otjiherero version of the Minister's speech had been read out, there was a loud interjection from the floor immediately beneath the podium: 'Where's the apology?' Only when the Minister had come back and had stated emphatically that she thought she had in fact given an apology, did the audience seem to be satisfied.

8 This and the following quotes are given from Förster 2010: 283, who uses a rendering of the oral delivery. For an official German version see: http://www.windhuk.diplo.de/Vertretung/windhuk/de/03/Gedenkjahre__2004__2005/Seite__Rede__BMZ__2004-08-14.html; an English version also appears on the Embassy's site: http://www.windhuk.diplo.de/Vertretung/windhuk/en/03/Commemorative__Years__2004__2005/Seite__Speech__2004-08-14__BMZ.html (both accessed 13.5.2015).

9 The quotes in this paragraph continue from the same speech (see footnote 8 above).



Fig. 11.3 Luther Zaire, then residing in Bochum, Germany, at the Ohamakari commemoration, August 14, 2004. He wears a GDR army tunic, adorned with GDR medals, to acknowledge the GDR's contribution to Namibia's liberation struggle. This carefully chosen outfit stands for contradictory, yet indispensable dimensions of Namibian–German relations and memory politics present particularly at this occasion. Photograph: Jane Katjavivi.

The incident underlines differences in memory practice and appropriate wording that may exist between Namibia and Germany; it also speaks to the importance of ritual wording in adequately dealing with the past in this context. However, the inherent problems and contradictions of this carefully worded speech in terms of a viable reconciliation process were to be revealed in full only through subsequent developments. These later developments revolved around the interlinked issues of reparation, which the speech had skirted, and of acknowledgement of the victims (through their descendants) as partners in dialogue.

Still, the immediate response from speakers who succeeded Wiczorek-Zeul on the rostrum was overwhelming. Paramount Chief Riruako announced he would now shelve his prepared – and one might surmise quite tough and inflammatory – speech, obviously to see what exactly would come out of the German Minister's words. Pohamba advised his fellow citizens to take up the apology and see what would come of it.

FIG. 11.4 German Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul with Herero Chiefs and the German Ambassador at the provisional monument for Samuel Maharero, Ohamakari commemoration, August 14, 2004. The text on the wreath she laid reads 'Wir bitten um Vergebung unserer Schuld/ Forgive us our trespasses'. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.



In this way, Namibian speakers from different perspectives welcomed the German Minister's statements. However, responses from representatives of various political hues in Namibia were much less enthusiastic than those of their German counterparts. A rash press statement had led German media astray, when on the very evening of the Ohamakari event, it was claimed that the ATCA court case had been withdrawn. Riruako's group immediately clarified the position and underlined that suspension was not equal to withdrawal (Förster 2004: 9–10). Still, the German pronouncement was not only premature, it also revealed a fundamental misunderstanding. For Ovaherero spokespersons, the formal apology would be little more than a token gesture were it not followed by a material act of recognition and redress. Shelving a more sternly worded speech or even suspending the law suit therefore was seen only in the sense of giving the German counterparts a chance to come forward with meaningful action, which was seen as a prerequisite and possibly impending. As Riruako pointed out a few days later in response to journalists reporting that the German Government expected the lawsuit now to be withdrawn: 'The verbal apology is a necessary aspect of progression towards reconciliation and reconstruction', yet '... we must not lose sight of the reality of our circumstances. For Ovaherero to feel a sense of closure, material and economic redress must be forthcoming'. Consequently, Riruako stated: 'To withdraw the case is an issue that is non-negotiable ... until we see that we are in serious business' (TN 20.8.2004).

Even though at the Ohamakari event itself the matter was presented as practically an exclusively Ovaherero affair, the broader picture was reflected some three months later. Ambassador Massing was also present at the IKhawese Heroes Day celebrations, which in this year were held at Goamus, to mark the discovery of a spring by the late *Kaptein* Dawid Witbooi. As noted in a newspaper report, 'Massing reiterated German Minister Wieczorek Zeul's [sic] apology, made at the commemoration of the Ohamakari battle, for the crimes committed against the Herero and Nama communities'. Besides 'remembrance

... for the late *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi, ... this year's event also commemorated the victims of the 1904 war against the German colonial forces' (TN 9.11.2004). In this way, the centenary of the Namibian War was observed also in Gibeon, while the clearly larger commemoration at the centenary of *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi's death in action, followed one year later (cf. ch. 8). This specific balancing of events clearly points to diverse regional and sectional emphases.

A courageous act and its grave ambiguities

There can be little doubt that the impact of Wieczorek-Zeul's speech was massive, and this was reflected in the Namibian media. However, public response in Germany clearly was not as intense. The minister's clear departure from the earlier official attitude evoked objections from the conservative opposition in Germany at the time. Wieczorek-Zeul was blamed for a potentially 'costly emotional outbreak' and detractors specifically targeted her use of the term 'genocide' as potentially damaging to the German position in the court cases pending in the U.S.A. The same statement reiterated the trope about 'judicially and historically contentious assessments'.¹⁰ By and large, on the level of naming and discourse, Wieczorek-Zeul's foray proved sustainable to a surprising extent on the German side. Subsequently, it was no longer possible for political spokespersons under four successive German governments with changing party political complexion to seriously dissociate themselves from her words.

However, there has always been a serious limitation to the impact of the minister's speech. Thus, during the debate on a motion on Namibia in March 2012, liberal deputy Michael Kauch reminded Wieczorek-Zeul that Joseph Fischer, the Foreign Minister in the Red–Green coalition that ruled in 2004, had called her statement 'the private opinion of Ms. Wieczorek-Zeul'. Moreover, Kauch reminded his audience that Fischer had thus articulated 'the choice of words and the assessment in terms of international law' that 'all Federal Governments have maintained'.¹¹

More recent developments and an assessment of its long-term impact, then, underline the conclusion that Wieczorek-Zeul's apology had been *incomplete* to begin with. This carries important political implications. From existing literature, a list of requirements can be culled that must be met for a 'complete' apology where crimes against humanity are concerned.¹²

10 <http://www.ekir.de/www/service/23D9C38DDDE54DAD86B7810A73A49F9E.php> (accessed 18.4.2013); NE 19.8.2004; taz 21.8.2004.

11 *Deutscher Bundestag. – 17. Wahlperiode. – 168. Sitzung. Berlin, Donnerstag, den 22.3.2012*, p. 19994 (the debate is taken up again in ch. 12).

12 The following argument builds on Breitweg 2012: 6–12, 16–9; for important concepts of apology, see in particular Teitel 2006; Galtung 1996: 107, 2005; Daase 2013; Engert 2011: 158–62; with direct reference to Wieczorek-Zeul's intervention, see also the interview with prominent peace researcher Johan Galtung, AZ 10.3.2006. The issues of 'guilt and penitence' have been addressed much in the vein discussed along the lines of deep apology in an opinion piece by Marc Springer (2015) in the AZ of 18.3.2015. Without giving any concrete reference, Springer summarises much of the above requirements for remorse and penitence, even referring to the concept of 'social contract'. It is hard not to see this in the context of the 25th anniversary of Namibia's independence which was then imminent, and one may wonder what exactly Springer has in mind.

Such requirements can be summarised in the ‘status of the speaker’ representing the state. This means basically the President (head of state) or the Chancellor (head of government), or parliament has to come forward. Furthermore, injustice and its perpetration need to be recognised without reservation. Such conditions preclude the following strategies (requirements) which can weaken the apology:

- (a) attribution to particular persons or instances;
- (b) ascription to external actors;
- (c) qualifying and historicising by assigning the deeds to history far in the past;
- (d) anonymisation;
- (e) playing down.

The speaker should:

- (a) identify with the collective represented;
- (b) address in the first instance the victim group;
- (c) articulate the – unrealistic – wish to undo what has happened and pledge it will not happen again;
- (d) finally, *ask* for forgiveness.

Such statements can also be supported and accompanied by bodily performance. Not insignificant in this context is West German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s famous gesture on his first official visit to the Polish capital of Warsaw in 1970. A quarter century before, Warsaw had been razed to the ground by the German army; two uprisings, one in the Jewish Ghetto (1943) and one by the Polish Home Army (1944) had been crushed with particular brutality. When Willy Brandt arrived in front of the memorial of the Ghetto Rising, he spontaneously fell on his knees. Even as a former political exile, not personally implicated in the Nazi crimes but with a record of courageous resistance, Brandt in this way created an incisive and emblematic image of genuine remorse (Teitel 2006: 105).

Since any intervention of this kind will take place at only a brief moment in time, the overarching context is of great importance. Requirements include a broadly based process of ‘working through’ what has happened,¹³ a culture of remembrance including appropriate monuments and a willingness to respond to requests for material reparations.¹⁴ These requirements dovetail with considerations immediately related to the Nama–German War about how a ‘discourse on violence and genocide’ can contribute to ‘restore and recuperate

13 Referring to Adorno’s (1963) notion of *Aufarbeitung*; see *supra*, Introduction.

14 Breitweg 2012: 11; it is worthwhile to note comment in the leading German quality newspaper on the apology offered by Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić for the massacre of Srebrenica in 1995. While this move was welcomed, in particular coming from a former proponent of extreme Serbian nationalism, the op-ed also stressed that ‘reconciliation also requires deeds: objective historical instruction, encounters, concrete assistance’. Nikolić had asked for forgiveness ‘on my knees’ (SZ 26.4.2013). Moreover, it was stressed by commentators including US President Barak Obama, that the actual qualification of what had happened as ‘genocide’ was decisive. Nikolić had shunned this (FAZ, 26.4.2013). This example from current debate underlines that we are dealing here with well established international norms.

the humanness' of victims, survivors and descendants (Biwa 2012: 93). Biwa sees this predicated on acknowledging 'violent excesses' and on engaging with 'how the individual and the social body propose their understanding of genocide, trauma and reconstruction in their lives' (Biwa 2012: 94). All of this can be focused into an adequate form of 'including the other' (Habermas 1999).

If tested against these criteria, Wiczorek-Zeul's speech at Ohamakari seems wanting as a complete, or credible, and sustainable apology. The Minister's speech certainly attested to her personal courage, while precisely the need for such courage indicated in part the apology's inherent limitations. Wiczorek-Zeul introduced herself as Cabinet Minister and as a representative of the Federal Government and the Bundestag. Here, one needs to take into account that Cabinet Ministers in the German Federal Government are not elected by Parliament, but in formal legal terms at least, are sitting solely by the pleasure of the Chancellor. Consequently, Wiczorek-Zeul's position was elevated, but in no way equivalent to the head of government or head of state. The text also contains some features that are ambiguous to say the least. Understandably, Wiczorek-Zeul referred to historical personages, in particular General von Trotha whose name was also familiar to most, if not all of her listeners. She also mentioned August Bebel, the co-founder of her party, the SPD, and registered her pride in his upright stance against the colonial war.¹⁵

While in a political speech such personalisation is certainly common and mostly legitimate, in this case such rhetorical devices also reverberate with ways to qualify and water down the apology. The crimes, even if committed in 'the German name', are still fixed on one particular perpetrator, Trotha, who is joined moreover by Bebel as the exponent of another Germany. Again, insisting on oppositional and countervailing forces is important and legitimate, but in the configuration of Wiczorek-Zeul's speech, there was a risk of obliterating in this way the responsibility of the state she claimed to represent, albeit in the somewhat unclear ways described above.

A further ambiguity concerned the way Wiczorek-Zeul dealt with 'responsibility' and 'guilt'. In her speech, she used both terms, and in particular when asking for forgiveness in explicit reference to a religious formula that refers to a personal appeal to God, she employed the term 'guilt'. In contrast, the discourse on historical 'responsibility' hinges on the distinction between this term and 'guilt'. Whereas 'guilt' pertains to direct perpetrators, 'responsibility' falls upon the collective that is linked to them in various ways, including, as in the case of state mass crime, citizenship of the state in whose name such crime was committed. On account of that, Wiczorek-Zeul, speaking in the first person plural (we) – in the name of the collective and the state – claimed acceptance both for 'responsibility' and 'guilt', and then, changing into the first person singular (I), asked for forgiveness in terms of the Lord's Prayer, in keeping with the biblical phrasing again, for 'our trespasses' which may be read to imply reference to Germans or Germany. In this way, the notions of 'guilt' and 'responsibility' are blended into each other in a way that not only lacks clarity, but also obfuscates the central issue of apology. Somehow, what is at issue happened in the

15 See also the quotes from Bebel's speeches in chs 2 & 3.

distant past, one hundred years ago, and only 'nowadays a General von Trotha would be prosecuted and convicted'. By the same token, potential consequences for the German state, in whose name Trotha acted, are not mentioned. While responsibility and guilt is confessed, forgiveness is asked for 'guilt'. In this way, close reading reveals at least a tendency and subtext to relegate genocide to history and to the level of a personal misdeed.

It seems that this 'wisely phrased' speech (Förster 2004: 9) was in fact geared more to judicial and diplomatic exigencies – where Wiczorek-Zeul probably made full use of a very limited space to manoeuvre – than to the requirements of a complete and solid apology. These observations should not diminish Wiczorek-Zeul's accomplishment. In her own words, she crafted the text, feeling like she was 'walking a tightrope', and recalls that on her way back to Windhoek, she was not sure whether she would be fired from her ministerial post (Wiczorek-Zeul 2007: 48–49). Also in this way, even in retrospect, writing three years later, Wiczorek-Zeul implied in no uncertain words that she was basically speaking in a personal capacity. Not only was she not sure about the response of the Chancellor and the Government, but she was aware that what she had said formally went against the grain of established Cabinet policy, and in particular, against the guidelines laid down by the Foreign Office. Any later attempts to gloss over this, and claim that an apology had in fact been given and consummated in Wiczorek-Zeul's speech, lack a factual basis and are, at best, retrospective interpretations or wishful thinking. More importantly, these inherent problems became apparent during the ensuing developments around the issue of apology, reparation and restitution.

Such deficits were not readily noticed by observers during or immediately after the speech was delivered. For the moment, asking forgiveness appeared to be 'the decisive gesture of humility which went far beyond anything anybody had dared to hope for in advance' (Förster 2004: 8). Wiczorek-Zeul's 'evident emotion' also elicited 'great respect' among the audience, and without a doubt greatly enhanced her credibility. However, a foreboding of difficulties appeared in the overly rash announcement and media reports that the HPRC lawsuit was now withdrawn (Förster 2004: 10). Such misunderstandings were corrected immediately, but they conveyed a sense of urgency for German officialdom. The important factor seemed to be not the years of missing dialogue but the urgent attempt to end the lawsuit, which had been filed as a kind of emergency measure on account of the failure to reach serious dialogue. At the same time, Wiczorek-Zeul insisted even three years later that 'the German and Namibian governments are of one mind' when it comes to 'rejecting demands for reparations'.¹⁶

In this way, Wiczorek-Zeul had started on a difficult road that was fraught with inherent contradictions. She had embarked on an attempt to offer a credible and sustainable apology without envisaging material consequences that were clearly connected to the admission of responsibility. The main problem that emerged during the following months and years is closely connected to this basic tension stemming from the incomplete apology. This

¹⁶ 2007: 50; note that this statement came well after the motion of the Namibian National Assembly of October 2006 (see below).

problem can be summarised as a mismatch between Wieczorek-Zeul's personal courage and commitment as demonstrated at Ohamakari on the one hand, and the apparent absence of a clear and coherent political strategy on the other. Such a strategy would have had to address the expectations raised by the apology and indeed the exigencies such an apology entails. These requirements include, above all, an approach that clearly conveys to the recipients of such an apology a feeling of sincerity and trust. An apology for a mass crime such as genocide needs to include a genuine intention for redress or otherwise, 'reparation', precisely in the sense of 'repairing', even though the losses may indeed be 'irreparable'.¹⁷ It is obvious that reparation in this sense needs to be directed at the damage that has been done and at the victims of the genocide. As will become clear from the following review of subsequent developments, what was lacking was not so much the setting forth of concrete goals but a readiness to enter a dialogue with the victim side as the logical next step following a serious apology.

Only a clear idea about the next steps to be taken, and about goals eventually to be achieved in seriously reaching a common understanding, would have implied a realistic avenue towards reaching a form of reconciliation that would be acceptable to all parties concerned, most of all to those in the victim position. It becomes obvious that the lack of such a vision was closely connected with the inherent weaknesses of Wieczorek-Zeul's apology. The months following the Ohamakari event were marked by erratic activities¹⁸ that did not result in the required meaningful dialogue driven by victim concerns. These activities were all predicated on the idea that the apology offered did not entail any obligation to compensate the descendants of the victims. A 'panel on reconciliation' that was aired right after the Ohamakari event (Förster 2004: 10), and which might have been a venue for meaningful dialogue, never materialised. In this way, the appeal from Namibian Prime Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab that 'All is well so far, but the real dialogue must now commence in earnest. The two sides would need henceforth to talk with each other and not past each other' (TN 18.8.2004), was never really answered.

GERMAN UNILATERALISM

The idea of a reconciliation process initiated by the German side was floated, in bits and pieces one could say. The ways in which this happened were largely defined by conjunctures arising from German politics.

Contours of such a reconciliation process emerged at a conference held in November 2004 in Bremen, on 'Realities, traumata, perspectives 1904–2004: The Herero war – one hundred

¹⁷ Doxtader & Villa-Vicencio 2004; of course, the well-worn German debate around *Wiedergutmachung* (setting right again) revolves around precisely these issues; see Hockerts 2001 and further *infra*, Conclusion.

¹⁸ The following account will not go into great detail but will take up particularly salient stages of what has become over the years a drawn out and arduous process.

years later', with the participation of Ovaherero dignitaries and German and Namibian officials,¹⁹ and also an array of academics. As Paramount Chief Riruako remarked in retrospect (*TN* 23.11.2004), one of the problems with this event was its ill-defined character. The programme framed the conference as 'an academic encounter' but at the same time, one 'where academics, representatives of civil society, people committed to contribute to the needed peace process will come together and share views with the aim to contribute towards the foundation on which political stakeholders could build'.²⁰

The eventual composition of the conference participants with a large representation of Ovaherero representatives from both camps, as well as Namibian and German political and civil society actors, sat uneasily with the largely academic programme of lectures. The Ovaherero representatives could contribute only in limited ways to the 'dialogue' proposed in the long motivation text that preceded the programme. In sum, there were reasons to expect an exchange between German and Namibian government officials as well as Ovaherero representatives, and this certainly motivated a rush of Ovaherero activists who were anxious to attend.²¹ However, the resultant strange amalgam between scholarly exchange, political platform and deliberations on the way forward could hardly satisfy hopes for real advances of the cause pursued, in particular by the Ovaherero delegates.

Given this lack of clarity, the negotiations some Ovaherero delegates apparently had expected from this event were quite out of the question as far as German officialdom was concerned. Arguably the most indicative feature of the entire exercise went largely unnoticed at the time: On the first day of the conference, before proceedings had even started, the local Bremen newspaper carried a front-page interview with Wieczorek-Zeul. Here she announced a reconciliation initiative with Bremen's Mayor Henning Scherf as its chairman.²² In other words, the Minister had publicly announced an outcome which might have emerged as the result of coming deliberations, but in this way was pre-empted. Eventually, this plan did not materialise, while the Bremen Conference remained a point of discussion in Namibia for some months. During this time, various initiatives for reconciliation were pursued which eventually came to naught.

The main reason for the lack of outcomes can be seen in a further turn by Wieczorek-Zeul, but obviously the ill-defined institutional setting of all these activities, apparent already in Bremen, also proved of little help. To this must be added the difficulties of internal Ovaherero politics.²³ Some nine months after the Ohamakari event, late in May 2005,

19 Nangolo Mbumba, Minister of Information and Communication Technology at the time, attended the entire three day conference, while Wieczorek-Zeul was present only for the opening and left on the same day. The organisers obviously had raised high hopes among Namibian participants, as my personal observation and numerous informal talks during the event and subsequently have confirmed; see also programme (in the possession of the author); *TN* 23.11.2004; *AZ* 24.11.2004

20 Text of the programme.

21 The author was approached for assistance in these matters shortly before the conference.

22 *Weser-Kurier*, 19.11.2004; note that in Bremen, the mayor is equivalent to the head of government of one of the smallest German states. After long service in this and other functions, Henning Scherf certainly was widely respected and quite influential within the SPD.

23 See newspaper report, *AZ* 16.2.2005; Matundu-Tjiparuro 2005; on the latter, *NE* 10.1.2005; *AZ* 11.1.2005.

Wieczorek-Zeul was honoured, together with Bishop Zephania Kameeta, with a prize for her reconciliation work. On this occasion, she elaborated on her reconciliation initiative and announced that €20 million would be disbursed over a period of ten years. These funds were to be earmarked for regions of Namibia predominantly inhabited by victim communities.²⁴ Besides the obvious discrepancy between the US\$ 2 billion demanded in the court cases in the United States and this sum, one main objection raised by a number of spokespersons was again that the announcement had been made without due consultation with the various stakeholders (*TN* 27.5.2005). One may see both the comparatively paltry sum and the unilateralism of proceeding related to the announcement a few days earlier by the SPD leadership. They sought early national elections after suffering a series of grave electoral set-backs in key German states, most recently in the most populous one by far, North Rhine–Westphalia. As things stood, Wieczorek-Zeul had to consider the likelihood of losing her ministerial post within the next four months. Eventually, the September election resulted in a grand coalition government, where Wieczorek-Zeul retained her post and continued her policy, even though under a conservative chancellor.

As the year of 2005 wore on, more problems surfaced. During the German summer recess and electoral campaign, several interventions from Namibia tried to push the matter forward. Thus, the Namibian Prime Minister, whose government by necessity was meant to play a central role in the reconciliation initiative mapped out by Wieczorek-Zeul, pointed out, some three months later, in May, that he had not been approached officially by the German side on the subject (*TN* 15.8.2005). Paramount Chief Riruako, who was receiving criticism among Ovaherero, chose harsher words once again and argued that while Germany was not seen to be able or willing to stand up to her responsibility on account of past mass crimes, she was not fit for the seat in the U.N. Security Council then coveted by the Red–Green Government still sitting (*AZ* 24.8.2005). Arnold Tjiuiko, NUDO MP in the National Assembly, also pointed out that one year after Wieczorek-Zeul's speech no formal talks had been held either with the Namibian Government or Ovaherero representatives (*Deutsche Welle* 7.9.2005). At the same time, the Namibian Government drew fire from the opposition for its handling of the issue. The government clarified it was waiting for an official German initiative and strongly denied charges that it had declined additional funds for development. However, at the same time the government warned against 'bringing regionalism and ethnicity into the public forum' and in this way pointed to potentially divisive effects.

Thus, the Namibian Government conceptualised the initiative as another form of 'development aid' and not as 'compensation'.²⁵ This statement clearly pointed to the exigencies of safekeeping Namibian sovereignty. At the same time, the declaration can be read as a response to criticism for neglect of communal areas in southern and central

24 Speech by Minister Wieczorek-Zeul, <http://www.ekir.de/www/downloads-archiv/ekir2005-05-24-Peter-Beier-Preis-wieczorek-zeul.pdf> (accessed 22.4.2013).

25 Media Briefing by The Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Minister of Information and Broadcasting on the Alleged Inaction by the Namibian Government to Secure N\$ 160 million from the German Government for the Hereros, Ref: 13/6/11, 18 August 2005.

Namibia – where groups who trace their collective experience to the genocide reside – compared to attention given to the northern regions with the most solid SWAPO support.

The reconciliation initiative reached its nadir during the state visit of Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba in Germany late in November 2005. The Namibian delegation refused to sign an accord setting the initiative on firm ground, arguing that consultations with the affected communities were still needed (*TN* 30.11.2005; Zeller 2005b). The diplomatic éclat could be patched up, but at the time, it underscored a serious difference in approach. The two sides differed on how to come to terms with colonial genocide, and how to reach reconciliation between the heirs of the victims and the perpetrators.

The reconciliation initiative has remained a contentious issue even after it began to be implemented. Complaints by local communities who felt they were side-lined have been a continuous feature.²⁶ At the same time, the initiative is cited as a programme of effective reconciliation, and therefore as a justification for inaction, whenever debate about the need for a solid or ‘complete’ apology flares up in Germany. Renamed the Namibian–German Special Initiative Programme (NGSIP), by mid-2014, it had dispensed N\$ 274 million under the auspices of the NPC to finance local initiatives over a range of issues, covering the provision of livestock, the drilling of boreholes and also the establishment of internet cafés (*NE* 29.7.2014). The obvious tensions between this material assistance and the complaints about a lack of recognition of the underlying issues, and also about persistent unilateralism, have beset this programme from the beginning and apparently have not been resolved up to early 2015. It is not without significance that the reference to ‘reconciliation’ eventually was dropped from the official designation of the programme, leaving unaddressed once again the reasons why a ‘special initiative’ was deemed necessary at all.

AN ACTIVE MINORITY: GERMAN POSTCOLONIAL RESPONSE

Meanwhile, the cause for apology and genuine postcolonial reconciliation did not remain without its advocates in Germany. To assess their activities, we need to note the absence in Germany of what can be considered as a postcolonial presence on a mass scale. That is the situation confronting former colonial powers in Western Europe, in Britain, France, Belgium or the Netherlands who have seen massive immigration from erstwhile colonies during the second half of the 20th Century (see Lutz & Gawarecki 2006). Immigration into Germany has also been massive during these decades. However, the pattern has been of a different complexion and remains practically devoid of a direct colonial nexus. Under such circumstances, voicing postcolonial concerns falls upon a limited number of groups. Some groups of Afro-Germans or ‘black Germans’ refer to their general solidarity with African causes. Furthermore, various advocacy groups have formed who see their task as assembling information on colonial connections and educating the broader public about Germany’s

²⁶ This continued to mid-2014; see *NE* 16.7.2014 for complaints by chiefs from the Kaokoveld Region.

colonial heritage and the obligations that flow from it. In part, such groups trace their origins back to the largely defunct organisations of the broad Anti-Apartheid Movement, which in turn formed part of a wider and variegated third world solidarity movement of the 1970s through late 1980s. However, today, active groups and individuals have developed their own forms of political practice which set them clearly apart from the older movements.

One innovative form has centred on efforts to sensitise the public to aspects of their everyday environment that point back to German colonialism. Local initiatives in a number of cities have identified items such as memorials; street names that refer to leading colonialists, or graves of such personages. Some campaign for expunging names of colonialists from places of honour such as street signs or military barracks; others organise city tours that lead to sites connected with German colonialism. In addition, sustained work at counter information is under way, in order to create some counterweight against rightist websites which formerly enjoyed a virtual monopoly of information on German colonial history via the internet.²⁷ In addition, some organisational nuclei of the solidarity movement survive, most notably MAKSA, the largely church-centred working group on Southern Africa, which once formed the springboard to create the organised Anti-Apartheid Movement in Germany and eventually survived it by many years. However, activism has clearly found new avenues, as attested in particular by activities connected with Namibia since 2004.

Mobilisation during the centennial year 2004 was indeed remarkable and that point is even considered in some quarters as a turning point in dealing with the German colonial past more generally. This change also found expression in a wave of varied fiction, addressing the heritage of German colonialism in Africa (Göttsche 2013: 63–5). In 2004 and during the following years, mobilisation was based on an array of small civil society connections as well as on networks of dedicated individuals. Still, the interest that became apparent in commemorations and information functions centred on Namibia²⁸ came as a surprise for many. Remarkably, the centennial for the Maji Maji War in present day Tanzania roughly one year later also spawned a number of activities that surpassed expectations. Centennial events in 2004 also served to spread awareness about the interconnected issues of genocide, apology and reparations.

By 2004, there was broad consensus within this limited but articulate section of civil society about the need for an open and fair dealing with issues emanating from Germany's colonial past. The genocide committed in Namibia stood out and still stands out from the general picture of this past. This is the case, not just for the particular criminal hideousness of what happened in Namibia. More importantly, the genocide forms a rallying point for descendants of victim groups today. In this way, activist groups concerned with postcolonial issues in Germany also saw a point of reference and potential partners in dialogue in Namibia. Lastly, disappointment with the *Bundestag* resolution in June 2004 (cf. Kössler 2004c), as

27 An exemplary site is www.freiburg-postkolonial.de. It carries fairly up to date sections with particular reference to Namibia.

28 See the overview provided by Zeller 2005a.

well as a measure of initial excitement about Wiczorek-Zeul's speech at Ohamakari, led some among these groups to take a more permanent interest in Namibia.

INITIATIVES IN THE GERMAN PARLIAMENT

After the general elections in September 2005, new avenues for influencing public debate opened with the parliamentary presence of the Left Party.²⁹ Moreover, the passing into opposition of the Greens, and four years later also of the Social Democrats, meant that to a certain extent members of parliament who were critical of established government policy were now more at liberty to speak their minds. On the other hand, the effectiveness of such initiatives remained quite limited.

While isolated in terms of parliamentary politics, the Left parliamentary party was prepared to co-operate on a number of initiatives that were launched in close cooperation with various postcolonial activities. In this way, new forms of publicity could be garnered for the concerns of reconciliation with Namibia. Such publicity remained the main effect to be generated from such activities. It was clear from the outset that motions introduced into the *Bundestag* by the Left were almost certain to eventually fail on the floor. Initially, this was difficult to countenance for Namibian stakeholders who saw their demands and aspirations largely met by such motions, which however were sure to be defeated. In spite of such frustrations, public discourse in Germany also could be moved in this way to a certain extent.

Thus, soon after being elected, Left Deputy Hüseyin Aydin³⁰ began preparations for a parliamentary initiative concerning a formal apology for the genocide, along with an adequate process of compensation. Aydin travelled to Namibia and spoke at Herero Day in Okahandja in August 2006, besides meeting a number of politicians and traditional leaders. In his statement, Aydin noted that 'the Federal Republic of Germany, as the legal successor of the Imperial Reich, has not lived up to her responsibility towards the surviving victims of the genocide and their posterity'. He criticised former initiatives, such as the *Bundestag* resolutions of 1989 and 2004, for skirting the issue of genocide. On account of this, Aydin considered these documents insufficient. Additionally, Wiczorek-Zeul's 'brave speech' at Ohamakari had not been followed up by adequate political action. Thus, Aydin saw the lawsuit filed by the HPRC as beneficial for alerting the German public.³¹

29 The following three paragraphs rely largely on Kössler 2008a: 239–40.

30 Of Kurdish migrant background, Aydin has his political roots in trade unionism and took a prominent role in the labour struggles against the closure of the huge Krupp steel mill in Duisburg-Rheinhausen 1987–93. During his tenure at the *Bundestag* (2005–9), he was leading representative (*Obmann*) of his party in the Committee of Economic Co-operation and Development. As such, his role in Namibian–German relations was part of his duties. Aydin was not returned to parliament in 2009. Ever since, Niema Movassat has taken up Namibian issues as the main parliamentary spokesperson of the Left in such matters.

31 Hüseyin Aydin, MdB, *Rede am Herero-Tag in Okahandja (Namibia)*, 27. August 2006, as disseminated via email; see also NE 31.8.2006; also TN 1.9.2006.

More than eight months passed from the initial preparations for Aydin's parliamentary initiative until it reached the floor of the Bundestag. During this time span, obstacles had to be cleared that existed within the Left Party and its constituency. Apparently, at least in part, such problems were related to long-standing loyalties with SWAPO who, while in exile, had received sustained support in East Germany. Some persons who had been involved in this work now were active in the Left Party, viz., its predecessor body, the PDS. The apparent divergence of the initiative in support of the reparation claim and the stance taken by the current SWAPO government seems to have troubled some of the old stalwarts.³² However, this constellation was soon to change appreciably.

REALIGNMENT IN NAMIBIA

When Aydin's motion was finally introduced into Parliament in July 2007, the occasion was highlighted by the presence of Paramount Chief Riruako in Berlin. This was in itself an unusual way to mark a parliamentary initiative which was clearly destined to fail in terms of formal politics. Politically the main feat, however, might well have been the press conference Riruako held on the occasion, jointly with Namibian Ambassador Peter Katjavivi. Katjavivi stated that 'Namibia welcomed that the matter is being discussed at the heart of German democracy'. However, he observed that 'because of the importance of the subject matter, it might have been more beneficial if the motion was brought before the Bundestag on an all-party basis' (NE 15.6.2007). The Ambassador thus articulated, in a way, the expectations of many Namibians that more would come out of the initiative and the German Parliament would at last actually adopt a motion and reach a decision that would adequately deal with this aspect of Namibian–German relations and Germany's past as a colonial power.

Katjavivi also addressed the concerns linked to Namibian national unity with regard to the reparation issue. He argued further that 'because of Namibia's colonial history, the genocide is a matter that affects everybody and touches all the Namibian people'. On that account, Katjavivi saw it as 'the duty of the Namibian Government to help facilitate a process that contributes to reconciliation and harmony firstly among the Namibians themselves, and secondly with its partners such as the Federal Republic of Germany' (NE 15.6.2007).

The joint appearance of the Ambassador and an oppositional MP from Namibia at this press conference was a remarkable intervention in the debate in Germany, even though it did not impact visibly or directly on the official German stance. At the same time, the occasion came as a consequence of prior developments in Namibia which marked a clear shift in SWAPO's approach to the issues of apology and reparation, along with the formation of additional collective actors.

32 Personal observation, Seminar '*Deutsche Kolonialverbrechen – Wie kann Wiedergutmachung für die Herero und Nama aussehen?*', Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin 13/14 October 2006, on which see: <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/Rez-Linke-Seminar-Namibia2006.htm> (accessed 24.4.2013).

The shift became official when SWAPO departed from its previous stance of not supporting any demand for reparations on the grounds that this might entail the risk of tribalist effects, favouring one or certain ethnic groups over others. In October 2006, the National Assembly carried a motion tabled by Riruako with only one member abstaining (TN 27.10.2006). When introducing his motion, the Paramount Chief reiterated the wish for 'the German Government to convene a consultative conference to set up an agenda for dialogue' (TN 20.9.2006). While signalling an important departure, this motion proved largely ineffective as far as practical politics was concerned during the following years. As emerged in particular during the first months of 2014, the Namibian Government, while adopting a position of support concerning demands for apology and reparation, has by no means taken over the agenda of the victim communities through this turn (see ch. 12). During the intervening years, these stark differences could be pushed into the background, given a measure of confrontation with the German Government and also a high level of mobilisation among various communities who began to claim victim status and to an extent also linked up with each other.

In Namibia, then, the issue of the genocide and its consequences has remained on the agenda ever since the centennial year of 2004. One may even say that the activities during that year initiated a range of new developments that brought a number of new actors into play.

While in 2004 the public forms of commemoration had been marked by a strong Ovaherero preponderance, now representatives of other ethnic groups also came to the fore. Thus, in early 2005, the Damara Cultural and Heritage Forum was formed to rectify the marginal position of Damara as well as other groups, and to counterbalance the pre-eminence of Ovaherero that had been evident during the commemorations in the preceding year. The new body pointed out that more than 17,000 people claimed to be 'Damara' had disappeared between 1904 and 1907. Thus, Chief!Gaseb stated: 'We want the dialogue to be a national event. It must not be limited to the Ovaherero people only. People in the North and South must also reveal their part in the war. They have a history' (TN 26.1.2005). The president of the Forum, Rosa Namises, explained a few weeks later: 'The genocide made us to lose our humanity, it alienated us from our culture, where today our younger generation are completely new people with a modern mindset and culture' (NE 15.4.2005). The call for reparations was again raised at the Damara Day (King's Festival) in November 2006.³³

While Damara spokespersons were at pains to sensitise the public to a victim status that had been given little notice before, the role of Nama groups, both as actors in the war and as captives in the concentration camps, had never been in doubt. Still, with the partial exception of the towering figure of Hendrik Witbooi – who has been conferred national honours by being depicted on the banknotes of independent Namibia – the contribution of Nama to anti-colonial resistance has been overshadowed by the prominence of the Ovaherero initiative and the attention that has been focused for a long time on the Ovaherero–German War and the first phase of the genocide, Trotha's proclamation of October 2, 1904 and the

33 Personal observation, Okombahe, November 10, 2006.

sealing off of the Omaheke. Therefore it could be said, that in much scholarly writing as well as in popular discourse, the Namibian War has been collapsed into a 'Herero Rising'.³⁴

The lack of public attention for Nama concerns, and particularly for those connected with the genocide, was due not in the least to the fragmentation of Nama groups. Among Nama, identification always related to a localised centre and often to a specific *Kaptein* or a royal family.³⁵ An overarching claim to being 'Nama' was certainly articulated at various junctures (cf. Kössler 2005b: 90–91). However, such reference to an umbrella identification did not constitute a unifying force. Local identifications, normally mediated by the *Kaptein*, always took precedence. Moves towards joint action in the context of commemorating the genocide therefore meant a new departure. This new thrust involved an attempt to forge closer ties between the various traditional leaders and also between the groups they represented.

In October 2006, representatives of nine Nama Traditional Authorities met in Windhoek and issued a statement that called for recognition of the genocide committed against their people during the Nama–German War; for a 'meaningful dialogue' with the German Government, and for decisive action by the Namibian Government to identify human bones that had been found near !Nami#Nūs (Lüderitz) in late 2006. These are likely to belong to victims of the concentration camp on Shark Island in the harbour of the southern town.³⁶ This joint call was followed up on February 6, 2007 by a large memorial ceremony to mark the centenary of the death of Cornelius Frederick of Bethanie, one of the outstanding Nama leaders in the Nama–German War. After his surrender, Cornelius Frederick had been imprisoned on Shark Island, where he perished as one of the thousands of captives that fell victim to the exterminatory regime in the camps.³⁷ In such initiatives, a more outspoken stance on the fate of the Nama during the colonial wars (Jacobs 2006) coalesced with efforts to move toward unity among Nama and southern leaders in general (NE 24.4.2007). !Nami#Nūs, situated in Angra Pequena Bay, fell into the territory of the !Ama (Bethanie) community and was sold by *Kaptein* Joseph David Frederick in 1884. This transaction is commonly regarded as the initial step to the colonisation of Namibia.

The rituals performed on the island and the stone raised in memory of Cornelius Frederick therefore carried an element of re-appropriating the area by the traditional community and symbolically registering their claim to the place, as well as commemorating what had transpired at the most gruesome concentration camp in Namibia. In his speech, *Kaptein* Dawid Frederick reflected on this issue and gave it a specific turn: 'The bones of the

34 This and the wider issues of a Herero exclusionism have been dealt with repeatedly by Henning Melber, see especially Melber 2005b, 2014; ch.2.

35 Currently, given a number of unresolved succession disputes, these relationships seem in flux.

36 TN 19.10.2006; 27.10.2006; personal observation.

37 NE 19.2.2007; the claim that Cornelius Frederick had been beheaded and his head brought to Germany, reported in these newspaper articles, is cast into doubt by historical research (email communication, Casper Erichsen, 20 February 2007), although this did happen quite frequently in other cases; see also ch. 12. Lalu 2009 has related broadly similar issues in South Africa to the fundamentally skewed ways the past is accessible in the colonial archive. The difficulties of tracing severed heads and also of verifying oral traditions, also speak to this point.

/Áman [sic] people are scattered across the desert plains in the Lüderitz area. The diamond fields have discovered many mass graves, and skeletons have been uncovered, yet we cannot lay claim to what is rightfully ours. We are plagued by unemployment, diseases and many of our youth cannot get scholarships to go for further studies' (NE 19.2.2007).

The printed programme of the commemoration officially referred to the 'Nama-Damara-Ovaherero and San (Bushman) Genocide 1904–1908' (Biwa: 2012: 231). This title highlighted the inclusive intentions of the organisers. At the same time, the spiritual content of the ritual was articulated as a concern to set right a situation where thousands who had perished in the concentration camps had been left unburied. At the occasion, this concern was articulated by Reverend Izak Frederick: 'The victims of Shark Island were not given a proper funeral. Many of our people still lie unburied in the desert dunes beyond Luderitz. We hope to use the 16 February 2007 to pray for these people and to lay their spirits to rest.' (Biwa 2007: 3). In this way, the commemoration also could be seen as an effort to make up for the ritual burial that could not be held a hundred years before and thus helped to 'lay the dead at rest' (Biwa 2012: 231–9; NE 19.2.2007).

However, as *Kaptein* Dawid Frederick made clear in his speech, the unknown number of severed heads deported to Germany also continued to haunt the affected communities. Referring to his ancestor, Cornelius Frederick, the *Kaptein* exclaimed: 'Where is the head of my forefather? Who will give us the answer? In view of these unanswered questions, I want the head back of my grandfather to be reunited with his body in death. In this, I appeal to the German Government to have the head returned to Namibia at the earliest convenience. We have unfinished business here. Only when the head has been returned and reunited with the rest of the body, we will find peace.' (NE 19.2.2007). In this way, the Shark Island commemoration in 2007 marked an important step in a process in which the issue of the deported skulls moved centre stage (see ch. 12).

At the same time, *Kaptein* Frederick reaffirmed the entrance of Nama into the struggle for apology and reparation: 'The Nama of the South . . . have been quiet for so long on this subject, but the time has come that we also make our voices heard. We are calling upon the German Government to come clean on the massacre on Shark Island where thousands of our people died, atrocities historically known to everyone. The Namibian Government needs to come to the aid of the Nama people so that the legacy of poverty, land deprivation and property confiscation be addressed and redressed' (NE 19.2.2007).

This latter call was taken up, in a specific way, by Deputy Prime Minister Libertine Amathila. She struck a note that was to frame the Namibian Government's approach during the following years. In this view, the specific experience of the communities affected by the Namibian War and the genocide is amalgamated into the overarching national narrative of anti-colonial resistance, not of specific groups but squarely of the Namibian nation: 'Unity of purpose and patriotism are critical to achieve sustainable development for all our people, regardless of colour, race, ethnic or religious origin, social status or creed. Our ancestors, despite their small differences, demonstrated their unwavering love for this land. We all should make the flames of that love and loyalty burn brighter and continue to build

on our colourful and diverse heritage'. Yet Amathila also stressed the role accorded to the affected communities: 'The State alone will not be able to single-handedly turn Namibia into a prosperous nation. Commemorations such as this must serve as platforms through which to consolidate our collective quest for sustained economic development. I urge you not to fail in this regard' (NE 19.2.2007; cf. AZ 20.2.2007). Significantly, only a few days afterwards, Prime Minister Nahas Angula explicitly endorsed the demand for reparations (TN 21.2.2007).

During the following years, *Kaptein* Dawid Frederick assumed a leading role in Nama initiatives connected with the genocide. Efforts at forging a body for united action moved forward with the formation of the Nama Traditional Leadership Association (NTLA) and sustained activity towards more constructive and comprehensive forms of dealing with the genocide. The event on Shark Island served, among other dimensions, as a first clarion call for an effective approach to rally different groups of claimants towards a combined effort. A rallying point was provided by *Kaptein* Dawid Frederick when he announced a plan to march from Shark Island to Windhoek to deliver an appropriate resolution to the German ambassador.³⁸

In the ensuing months, the project grew into the idea of a large, unifying event involving the entire area of southern Namibia. The march was to be routed from !Nami#Nūs to Bethanie, then through Keetmanshoop to reach the northern route to Windhoek. At every major stop, the march was to be joined by members of neighbouring groups. Thus, Bondelswarts would join the procession at Keetmanshoop, and all the other groups, such as Bersebaners, Vaalgras and Witbooi, along the northbound route. These groups included the Rehoboth Basters, who were to join when the procession passed through their area (*Gebied*). In this way, the plan represented an attempt to move squarely beyond a purely ethnically defined approach.

Up to the time of finalising this text in early 2015, the march has not materialised. One main reason is the lack of funds, another the difficulties involved in organising such a complex undertaking that would involve moving hundreds, if not thousands of people over 900 kilometres across the Namib desert and the arid countryside of southern Namibia. However, this plan has not been given up, and the basic approach of inclusive, trans-ethnic action has been sustained.³⁹

From the Shark Island commemoration in 2007 onwards, there was also a connection with the Ovaherero section under the leadership of Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako.

By late 2007, this broad alliance began to coalesce around the demand for the return of the human skulls of Namibians that had been transported to Germany during colonial times. The intertwined processes that led to a reasonably clear stance on this issue on the Namibian part involved representatives of traditional communities as well as the Namibian Government. Again, this proved only preparatory to negotiations with the German Government. In this way, the issue of the restitution of human remains, in particular

38 The following is based on personal talks during the years after 2007 and press reports; see also Salm 2010.

39 Early in 2013, *Kaptein* Dawid Frederick once again stressed that he still pursued this idea; see TN 8.1.2013.

of skulls, from Germany to Namibia has thrown into stark relief the difficulties in this postcolonial process of commemoration and remembrance. Revolving around human remains deported for alleged scientific purposes, the skull saga, as it evolved during the ensuing months and years is also indicative of the human pain and sorrow that is part of the entire process. In important as well as in unexpected ways, the issue of human remains has taken a pivotal role in the controversies over Namibian–German memory politics. It is on account of this that it will form the substance of the closing chapter of this book.

12

The Saga of the Skulls: Restitution Without Recognition

THE PROCESS OF RECOGNITION AND RECONCILIATION THAT APPARENTLY GOT UNDER WAY IN 2004 soon was stuck at an impasse. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, this impasse had been building up all along because the German Government had never contemplated a full apology for the colonial genocide. Besides the recognition and the naming of injustice and crimes committed, an apology would have implied acknowledgement of responsibility for redress and dialogue. For at least a decade, this need has been articulated in the call for a 'constructive dialogue' for which Namibian victim groups have clamoured. Such a dialogue is a prerequisite to reconciliation. Since the impasse blocked any hope for change, many activists and observers felt that resolving the issue of the human skulls that had been deported from Namibia to Germany in colonial times would help loosen the knots preventing progress. Such an expectation appeared justified on account of the sheer horror and blatant injustice involved in this issue. However, the reality turned out to be very different.

One of the deep concerns among victim communities when it comes to the issue of deported human remains is with their repatriation and proper burial, as introduced in the preceding chapter. A further constantly raised issue is what happened to these remains, and what the results of the race science research were for which these human body parts were claimed. In this chapter therefore, I go back to the roots of the deportation of human remains, as well as the difficulties that have emerged from their fate during the last century. I then look at the actors both in Namibia and Germany who were and still are involved in raising and pursuing the issue. Finally, I consider the two occasions when human remains have been returned to Namibia by German institutions. These include the debacle of the handover of 20 skulls to a Namibian delegation in Berlin in September 2011, as well as its sequels. A different, but no less dramatic and conflict-ridden perspective is opened by the circumstances of the second handover, which took place in Freiburg and Berlin in March 2014.

DEPORTATION AND RESTITUTION OF SKULLS

The deportation of skulls and other human remains in the past has created a situation that roughly a century later, makes it extremely hard to arrive at an equitable solution. The ways in which race science was pursued in the 20th Century and Germany's violent history are central factors that have contributed to this present predicament.

Collecting human remains

Severing the heads from fallen fighters or people who died in the concentration camps and transporting them to Germany was a transgression and injustice. Such acts are almost universally ostracised.¹ Nevertheless, this procedure was in line with scientific practice established during the 19th Century. In early modern Western Europe, science was established as a form of knowledge based on assigning categories to a huge range of objects, including plants, animals and humans. In this context, the mania (Laukötter 2013) for collecting and categorising each human or natural object was rife among European scientists by the late 19th Century. The quest for great numbers of skulls was driven by the perceived need for science to be based on a sufficiently large data base.² Even though contested in its time,³ the collecting practice of race science was closely linked to the idea of a science that would not only explain the world, but also put its practitioners into a position to control it. Building on such programmatic vistas, for which Francis Bacon is one prominent witness, race science and eugenics thrived on the idea that by understanding human heredity, ways could be found to produce improved, more competent humans.

At the close of the 19th Century, such ideas were widespread, and practitioners as well as adherents represented a broad range of political convictions (Weindling 1989: ch.2). It would be a mistake to construe race science as a 'rightist' current, since many 'progressives' believed in its promises and its methods. One should always be mindful that regardless of their strange ideas and inhumane actions, practitioners of this branch of 'science' were in no position to anticipate that their concepts would later feed into the criminal schemes of Nazism (Massin 2003: 202). However, some of the proponents of race science, including Eugen Fischer who also played an important role in Namibia, later rose to prominence under Nazi rule.

Whatever the further convictions of practitioners and adherents of this science may have been, their approach was tantamount to objectifying humans, and classification of

1 One may note that in various parts of the world particularly skulls are kept as objects of reverence (cf. Wieczorek et al. 2012), which is a far cry from keeping them in laboratories or show cases.

2 See Zimmerman 2001: 87–8; *passim* also on the caesurae anthropology underwent during the later 19th and early 20th Centuries; Gould 1981 dissects the epistemological misconceptions at the roots of race science.

3 The early criticism of 'race' concepts by one of the founding fathers of modern social science, Max Weber, is summarised by Kaube 2014: 216–24.

'races' also fed into assigning to these categories greater or lesser value or worth.⁴ In this way, racism was closely connected to the whole endeavour of race science. In fact, racist ideas were upheld even when empirical proof could not be mustered, and even though 'reality was the curse of anthropologists working in the field'⁵ – the 'material' they collected simply not bearing out their preconceived convictions.

When Africa was cut up into colonies for Western European states, these conquests afforded new opportunities to explorers, who often were also collectors of human remains and large arrays of other objects (cf. Wegmann 2013: 394; Henrichsen 2012: xiv–xv). At the time, particularly German scientists took pride in the scope and size of their collections that outdid their British or French counterparts. The relevant scientific associations in Germany had many more members than comparable learned bodies in other western countries (Gordon 2009: 46; Zimmerman 2001: 4–5). At the same time, these numbers reflected extensive networks on the national as well as on transnational and global scales. Colleagues and friends from around the globe would supply scientists with coveted study materials, and human remains were exchanged between scientists living and working at various places and in a range of countries.⁶ Even before Germany acquired colonies, the German state assisted in collecting activities (Zimmerman 2001: 152–3). Regardless of such global reach, there were focal areas from where human remains were taken and received. Germany itself always figured large in the collections, but the newly acquired colonies attracted particular interest and activity.

One example of this exploring and collecting was the Swiss traveller and natural scientist, Hans Schinz. He traversed Namibia in 1884–7 and collected, besides all kinds of plants, animals and ethnographic objects, human remains, including a skeleton he chanced upon on a recent battlefield in Ondonga, northern Namibia. Writing to his mother, he exclaimed, characteristically, 'you've simply got to collect *everything*'.⁷ Eventually, Schinz was found out and had to relinquish the skeleton, without the skull, when he had to flee from Ondonga. When Schinz arrived back in Zürich and displayed his large collection, including three human skulls, the local quality newspaper commended him as 'a martyr of science who, in the interests of his collection of skeletons, even goes as far as desecrating graves'.⁸ By implication, the desecration of graves was seen as a sacrilege, but one that was justified by the overriding concern for scientific progress.

This attitude dovetails with the approach of Eugen Fischer, one of the luminaries of race science and emerging eugenics at the time. Fischer visited Namibia in 1908 (see also

4 Cf. Zeidler's (1914) efforts to establish, in evolutionary terms, 'progressive' and 'regressive' features of facial muscular structures in four heads of Ovaherero preserved in formalin; for a critical review of Zeidler's work see Schnalke 2013.

5 Lange 2013: 47; note that this brand of physical anthropology had very little in common and in part ran directly counter to the pursuits of present day social or cultural anthropology.

6 cf. Wegmann 2013: 396–7; Schultze 1908, 1909, 1928 reflects a network comprising partners in, i.a., Berlin, Jena and Odessa.

7 Hans Schinz to Julie Schinz, 24.10.1885, in Henrichsen 2012: 80.

8 *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 4.5.1887 as quoted by Henrichsen 2013: 126.

Möller 2008: 60–1; Gordon 1998: 38–9). As is well known, this trip resulted in Fischer's (1913) study on the 'Rehoboth Bastards',⁹ which greatly enhanced his academic standing. Fischer also used his stay in Namibia to add to the established anthropological collection at his home university in Freiburg,¹⁰ which he was to head for some further 20 years. In his memoirs, Fischer relates how he took bodies from graves in the Namib Desert near Walvis Bay, presumably members of the *ǀAonin* (Topnaar) community. Fischer's account shows that he knew full well that his actions might hurt the feelings of relatives of the deceased and more generally, of their community. He claims that the 'small tribe' had disappeared from the region,¹¹ and the gravesides had been 'deserted and forgotten' (Fischer 1959: 77). Still, Fischer took further precautions: 'As drivers and diggers I used two Cape boys, since I tried to avoid taking native Hottentots or Herero in this case, who presumably might have considered it as painful that for scientific purposes that were beyond their comprehension we would disturb the peace of the graves of their own kind'.¹²

In these cases, one can still detect a measure of awareness that the reported acts violated every concept of decency and respect.¹³ Similarly, the scanty preserved record of official correspondence conveys both a readiness on the part of officialdom to accommodate requests for body parts with the aim of 'scientific' study, and an 'awareness of acting unjustly'. This awareness, however, did not keep officials from committing such acts; rather, they were motivated to shroud their deeds in secrecy and 'steal' the coveted human body parts (Hillebrecht 2013: 283). Such qualms were apparently absent or suppressed when the caption of a postcard, that was used as an illustration for a memory volume on the Namibian War at the time, informed the reader that 'Herero skulls' had been packed into crates to be sent to the 'Pathology Institute in Berlin'. And further: 'The skulls, which have been freed from their flesh by Herero women using glass shards . . . , come from Hereros who have been hanged or killed in action' (quoted in Krüger 1999: 98; see Zeller 2008a: 77; see Chapter 3, Fig. 3.2). Even though 'body parts could be acquired from the normal course of colonial rule' (Zimmerman 2001: 159), war and concentration camps enhanced the opportunities.

Thus, when the war made it difficult for zoologist Schultze to follow his original plan and collect animal specimens, Schultze grasped the alternative: 'I could put to use the victims of the war and take parts from fresh native corpses, which made a welcome addition to

9 The German term of 'Bastard', as its English equivalent, carries a derogatory meaning that is absent from the ethnonym of *Baster* which is employed by the community themselves.

10 Freiburg was one of the early and long term hubs of 'race science' in Germany; cf. Weindling 1989: 96–101, 142–4.

11 This was of course not true, as *ǀAonin* still reside in the region around Walvis Bay and the Kuiseb valley today.

12 Fischer 1959: 78; for further instances of a widespread practice of grave robbery in connection with the collection of human remains, see Zimmerman 2001: 161–2.

13 It is only fair to note that the practice of securing human skulls and skeletons by dubious and even fraudulent means was pervasive in anthropology at the time, and is even reported for the early champion of anti-racism in the profession, Franz Boas, who is said to have had 'unpeaceful nights and bad dreams' about this (quoted in Pöhl 2009: 72).

the study of the living body (imprisoned Hottentots [Nama] were often at my disposal)'.¹⁴ The reason was not just the pervasive violence of war and genocide, but the war situation apparently eased the transgression of violating human bodies.¹⁵ This was expressly noted by Lieutenant Zürn, otherwise infamous for his role at the beginning of the Ovaherero–German war (Gewald 1999: ch. 5). To a request by renowned anthropologist Felix von Luschan, Zürn responded that he saw good chances for procuring skulls, 'since in the concentration camps taking and preserving the skulls of Ovaherero prisoners of war will be more readily possible than in the country, where there is always a danger of offending the ritual feelings of the natives'.¹⁶

Human brains that were also studied in Berlin were obtained from 'South West African military hospitals',¹⁷ most likely a euphemism for the concentration camps. In this way, the collection and transportation of human remains was intimately linked to colonial wars and other forms of repression.¹⁸

The central figure of Eugen Fischer points to further dimensions. Fischer was not satisfied with studying bones alone. Since problems had been experienced in transporting soft parts of the human body, he suggested that prisoners sentenced to death should forthwith be sent to Germany alive, where they would fall victim to climatic conditions and then their dead bodies could be of service to science.¹⁹ Such exertions dovetail with the long term preoccupation of European anthropologists regarding the private parts of people from southern Africa, which also spurred such scientists on to quests for obtaining further study material (Gordon 1998).

In this way, the collection of skulls and other human body parts was a thriving activity. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the perpetrators were well aware of the transgression they committed. Their apparent insensitivity and manifest brutality should be read as one expression of a pervasive colonial and racist perspective. The relevance of such a perspective is underlined when we consider that respect for the dead is a fairly general trait of human culture, even though this is exhibited by a tremendous variety of practices which may be mutually exclusive of one another. In any case, the actions implied by deporting human skulls and human remains generally would have been abhorred even in Germany. It

14 Schultze 1908: viii; the extensive data from measuring 'Hottentots' presented elsewhere (Schultze 1928) must be seen in this light: the direct use of the situation in concentration camps.

15 At the same time, there are indications that violation of graves was one reason spurring Ovaherero into military resistance, see Pool 1991: 195, reporting from a manuscript by a German trader, Ludwig Conradt; see also Erichsen 2005: 144.

16 Ralf Zürn to Felix von Luschan, 25 June 1905, Archives Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin, IB 39, vol. 1, 775 / 05, as quoted in Zimmerman 2001: 245.

17 W. Waldeyer in Sergi 1909: 5; see Erichsen 2005: 141 for the deadly implications when prisoners entered the 'hospital' (*Lazarett*) on Shark Island.

18 On the later practice of using the bodies of executed, frequently political prisoners in Nazi Germany, and on the current discourse on ethics in medicine involved, see Hildebrandt 2013.

19 Eugen Fischer, *Schreiben betreffs Entnahme von Leichenteilen von Buschmannleichen vom 16.11.1913 an das Kaiserliche Gouvernement von Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, National Archives of Namibia, ZBU J.XIII.f.1 quoted in Wegmann 2013: 398.

should be noted that in Germany as in other parts of Europe, the practice of ‘body snatching’ for use in anatomic studies had been a contentious issue for a long time. At the time, this ‘organised attack on the dead of the poor’ had just been curtailed as a response to popular pressure (Hund 2009: 44). The cases of Schinz and Fischer referred to above also show clearly that these scientists were quite aware of crossing a threshold.

As has been pointed out, burial customs vary across Europe. In particular, on the continent, the removal of graves after a certain period of time – such as several decades – is widespread, and this includes the German speaking countries. In Britain, however, it is the norm to leave graves undisturbed for an indefinite time (cf. Weiss-Krejci 2012: 150). Nevertheless, gravesites and cemeteries have traditionally been held in respect, and their violation is a criminal act. Fischer’s (1959) account of various cases where he was involved in opening graves is striking when he relates the reverence and also ‘awe’ (*Scheu*) he felt when confronting opened graves in Germany, above all those of eminent personages of the medieval past. On the other hand, such feelings were manifestly absent when it came to dealing with Africans. While the remains of medieval princes were carefully preserved in their original positions, those of ‘Hottentots’ were unceremoniously transported for study to Germany. True, Africans were considered also to be humans, yet by the very action of anthropologists, they were denied ‘full humanity’ (Zimmerman 2001: 2).

Not by accident, conventional ideas about Africa in Germany denied the ‘dark continent’ any of the history that drew so much respect from a person such as Fischer. Anthropology as practised by those who collected and measured skulls relegated the colonised to the status of ‘natural peoples’, outside civilisation and history (Zimmerman 2001: 6–7, 149, 247). Still, it is worth noting that such an attitude found a parallel in the practice of dealing with human remains in Europe. Here, ‘representatives of foreign continents, particularly Africans, were seen as future objects of the anatomic theatre while still alive’, while anatomists went reverently about studies concerning the remains of friends or luminaries such as Immanuel Kant (Hund 2009: 36). Besides the morally questionable attitude, this also amounted to a logical circle, as they ‘believed to be able to read off the bones that what they thought they knew about the living’ (Zimmerman 2001: 37). Given the ‘body snatching’ practices mentioned above, one may say that attitudes linked to disdain for the lower strata in European society blended with racism, which also informed the collection of skulls and other human remains in the colonial sphere.

Treatment of the bodies of those who had died during the Namibian War was grossly different for Africans and Germans. Today, across Namibia, hardly any marked graves of African fighters in the Namibian War can be found (see also Matundu-Tjiparuro 2014). On the other hand, there are a considerable number of cemeteries or sections in cemeteries that are devoted to the German dead and are still tended by a private society that takes its name from the large German foundation for the care of war graves.²⁰ As a kind of

20 *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, founded in 1957; see Förster 2010: 104; for its significance in Namibian memory politics, see also above, ch. 5; for the German foundation, see <http://www.volksbund.de/en/volksbund.html> (accessed 18.7.2013).

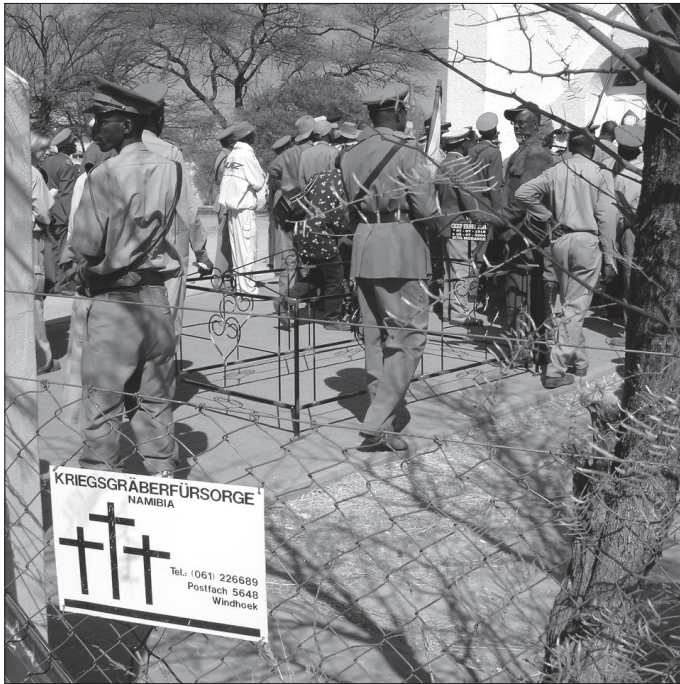


Fig. 12.1 Placard of *Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, Okahandja, with the mission church in the background and participants in Herero Day, 2005. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

testimony, their logo is affixed to the fences near the entrances of graveyards. This is the case in Okahandja, among other places, and every year Ovaherero pass this sign when visiting graves on Herero Day.

The lack of knowledge about the graves of African victims of the war is clearly not due to lack of concern on the side of African communities. As noted, the central Omaruru cemetery contains an unmarked site known to cover a mass grave, and efforts by the community are also indicative in the reburial of Chief Michael Tjisiseta.²¹ At Gibeon cemetery, the symbolic grave for Hendrik Witbooi, and immediately beside it the memorial for the victims of the raid on Hornkranz on April 12, 1893, underscore the concern. In a twisted way, the lack of such gravesites was addressed when fictitious ‘Herero’ graves – now removed – were erected near the German war cemetery at the Waterberg, obviously a token of the rapprochement between sections of Ovaherero and German speakers during the 1980s (cf. Förster 2008a). More recently, efforts for a dignified treatment of human remains unearthed during railway work near !Nami#Nūs also testify to a felt need to address the problem of human remains that have been denied a proper burial (cf. Kössler 2012c, see close of ch. 9).

All this underlines the concerns about burial and remembrance of the dead that for many black Namibians have remained unfulfilled regarding the treatment of those who perished in the Namibian war and genocide. In this way, the situation is yet another expression of the

21 Personal communication, Rudolph Hongoze, Omaruru, 29 April 2007; see ch. 8.

pervasive hegemonic and unequal relationships that shape memory practices and related politics in Namibia more generally. However, the skull issue took on a special celebrity status. This high profile was connected to the occasion of repatriating human remains, but was enhanced by circumstances of state politics that intervened, in a number of ways, in communal concerns with closure and equity.

Problems of restitution

In Germany, deported human remains were made into objects in more than one sense. Especially during the early 20th Century, these remains became objects of studies that were aimed to classify humans according to 'race', with the clear assumption that 'Whites' were superior while 'Negroes, Hottentots and many others' were supposed to be 'lower grade' (Fischer 1913: 302). After a few years, the practitioners of 'race science' moved away from the phenotypical approach of 'skull measuring' (Eugen Fischer) and resorted to other means to try to establish hereditary properties they still considered inherent in human races. Again, POW camps and concentration camps supplied them with the material they required, this time from Nazi-occupied Europe. In this way, 'body parts collected during the times of German colonialism apparently became subject of a largely disorderly forgetting in university archives. From crown witnesses they had moved to the margins of scientific racism within German anthropology'.²² This meant, in the case of the Alexander Ecker Collection held by the University of Freiburg, that the human remains were 'kept for years, quite unattended, in the basement of the university hospital' (Wegmann 2013: 401).

Still, these human remains continued to be treated as objects in the sense that they formed part of scientific collections. They were no longer exhibited publicly, as had been the case for instance with the famous Freiburg collection before World War I. However, these collections, and by this token the individual human remains, continued to be subject to administrative acts. Moreover, they were perforce drawn into the fate of the country to which they had been brought. Thus, during the turmoil of two World Wars, some of the holdings were destroyed, most notably when one of the few aerial bombs that hit German cities during World War I struck the collection in Freiburg, and a considerable number of human remains were destroyed by fire.²³ Eugen Fischer's subsequent appeal to private persons to help with replenishing the collection after this damage would suggest that 'it seemed to him fairly normal that private persons would be in possession of human skulls from the colonies'.²⁴

22 Seidler 2012: 31; cf. Schmuhl 2003: 33–5; Massin 2003: 204–16; for further context, in particular on the discarding of phenomenological or morphological traits as criteria for race classification, see Massin 1999, Kattmann 1999; as Proctor 1988: 175 notes, such shifts were 'not associated with any overall dissolution of racial rankings or of ethnic prejudices'.

23 cf. Wegmann 2013: 399–400; Möller 2008: 11–2; during World War II anthropological/race science institutions were bombed and destroyed in Berlin, Breslau (present day Wrocław), Cologne, Freiburg, Göttingen, Kiel, Königsberg (present day Kaliningrad) and Munich; cf. Proctor 1988: 166–7.

24 Wegmann 2013: 400; see *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* 1921/1, p. 9, <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/DKZ1921-Nr01-S9.htm> (accessed 14.8.2013).

Furthermore, collections were shifted between various institutions, transferred to various locals and re-assembled (Möller 2008: 12, 16, 57). The spread of 'ownership' of human remains over a number of institutions today adds to the difficulties for study about provenance (Stoecker 2012). All these shifts and destructions have created a situation where today it is a daunting task to trace specific human remains, and even more, to ascertain their provenance. Thus, in the early 2000s, the Freiburg collection was described as 'out of order and barely documented', whereas some skulls bore inscriptions such as 'Negro' or 'Hottentott' (Wegmann 2013: 402). Such inscriptions also underline the fact that, even initially, the collectors were not always interested in the names of the individuals whose remains they had taken and were then studying. For their intentions, it was often sufficient to link each individual human specimen to some roughly delimited ethnic or racial group. In other cases, names were recorded.²⁵

In terms of restitution, these circumstances have created very serious predicaments.²⁶ Whereas descendants of victims wish to have the remains of individuals identified, so that they can be adequately mourned and buried at home, this very understandable proposition has proved elusive. So far, research has yielded, at best, grounds to assign skulls to ethnic groups with sufficient certainty. In the Namibian case, human remains have been assigned provenance as 'Herero' and 'Nama', and also 'Damara', 'Owambo' and 'San'. It is clear that such categorisations fall far short of the wishes and needs of the descendants of the victims. Clearly, they expected the remains to be identified in such a way that they could be related each to a specific person and accordingly be buried at their homes by their communities. As we shall see, mere categorisation according to ethnic group raises further problems.²⁷

In 2011 and 2014, altogether 40 skulls and body parts were returned to Namibia by the Charité, the Berlin university hospital, and a further 14 skulls were returned by the University of Freiburg, from the local anthropological collection.²⁸ Another 15 skulls thought to originate in Namibia remain under study at the Charité. Three more skulls are known to be in the possession of the University of Greifswald (*infra*). It is known that the anthropological collection of the Goethe University, in Frankfurt on Main, contains some 12,000 skeletons, and the collection of the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Dresden is supposed to hold 6,500 'objects'; there are certainly more institutions with such holdings. All these institutions claim they have documentation only on the acquisition of their collections, but no information on how the human remains were obtained in the first place (cf. Kössler & Wegmann 2011).

25 Sergi 1909: 7 mentions eight names; and for Fischer's study of heredity in Rehoboth names and genealogies were essential (see Fischer 1913).

26 In a similar way, but more extensively, see Krüger 2013.

27 Biwa 2012: 245 refers to such concerns specifically amongst the !Ama community (Bethanie) concerning the head of Cornelius Frederick.

28 Press conference by University of Freiburg, 24.11.2011 (author's own observation); *Badische Zeitung*, (Freiburg) <http://www.badische-zeitung.de/freiburg/uni-freiburg-gibt-14-herero-schaedel-an-namibia-zurueck--52364152.html> (posted 24.11.2011; accessed 25.8.2013); cf. Wittwer-Backofen & Schlager 2013: 226, 234.

A further lead directs us to the University of Breslau, today Wrocław, where in 1908, Professor Hermann Klaatsch filed the request for 'Herero skulls' with the colonial administration (Gewald 1999: 190 fn. 256). At the time, Breslau was an important German university, but as a consequence of World War II, it is now in Poland. Moreover, the city was virtually razed to the ground at the end of that war. Generally, high numbers of skulls held by an institution do not necessarily imply that many of these human remains may be from former German colonies or more specifically, Namibia. Additionally, as we have seen, human remains procured in Namibia and elsewhere were not limited to skulls. In this way, the demand for repatriation opens a considerable range of further problems.²⁹

Obviously, these are not just practical or mundane difficulties. These issues have deep symbolic implications, both on the level of an individual's descendants and on that of communities seeking closure precisely by resolving the questions and issues surrounding unburied human remains. These problems are even more obvious when we consider Namibian oral traditions that refer to heads of important leaders that have been severed and deported to Germany, especially during the Nama–German War. In particular, in the case of Cornelius Frederick of Bethanie (see ch.11), who died on Shark Island on February 6, 1907, the oral tradition of his beheading contradicts starkly the historical record which is invoked by professional historians.³⁰ Such uncertainties, even where they may involve legends and myths, are at the same time integral dimensions of the genocide in one of its most appalling aspects.³¹ They point to the need for careful clarification and documentation. Such an effort would be incumbent on the present German state as the legal successor of the Empire in whose name or under whose purview the crimes in question were perpetrated.

The problem points back to the level of intergovernmental negotiations that appear to be prerequisite for any move forward, in this particular case as well as in the broader reparation issue. However, this is not all. As part of the postcolonial situation, on the Namibian side, victim groups play an indispensable and important role. This means that traditional leaders as well as the communities they represent have been involved, both as drivers of the process of restitution and as partners in the difficult and contradictory process of orchestrating a complex actor constellation. Inevitably, such a constellation involves the Namibian State and Government, whose actions and interventions merit particular attention.

29 The issue of tracing such collections and of identifying human remains that would warrant repatriation forms a topic of its own. See Möller 2008. I am also indebted to Heiko Wegmann for information and discussion on this issue. For some of his admirable work, see www.freiburg-postkolonial.de.

30 NE 19.2.2007; email communication, Casper Erichsen, 20 February 2007. The pointedly postcolonial perspective offered by Lalu 2009 alerts to the pitfalls and intricacies when confronting oral traditions with the colonial archive.

31 Although skull collecting was not completely bound up with the genocide; see below on the second restitution of skulls.

RETURNING SKULLS: POLITICS AND PRACTICE

Regardless of its spiritual dimension, the return of human remains turned out to be deeply enmeshed with politics. Such politics came to the fore in the negotiations leading up to restitution and also in the ways this restitution was enacted.

The difficult road to restitution

The issue of skulls and human remains from Namibia that still remain in the possession of various German institutions moved centre stage within Namibian–German memory politics through a number of developments in both countries that began to coalesce from about 2008. The fate of severed heads, in particular those taken from fallen leaders during the Namibian War, has been a concern for a long time. We have seen this concern in the oral tradition about the head of Cornelius Frederick, but this pertains also to others, such as the head of *Kaptein* Manasse of the Red Nation.³² The problem was not at first conspicuously in public view. This began to change when in October 2006 human bones were discovered within the ‘forbidden zone’ (*Sperrgebiet*) near !Nami+Nūs (Lüderitz), where access is prohibited on account of diamond mining. These remains were quickly connected to the concentration camps which had existed in this southern port town during the Namibian War (*NE* 16.10.2006). The issue gained further momentum through the centennial commemoration of the passage of Cornelius Frederick in February 2007 (see ch. 11).

From late 2006 considerable realignment took place in Namibia in regarding issues connected with the genocide, apology and reparation (as recounted in the previous chapter). After the National Assembly had passed a motion in support of the demand for an apology by Germany for the genocide and in support of reparations (in October 2006), the commemoration on Shark Island in February 2007 was another important step. In terms of formal politics, the motion carried by the National Assembly marked a turning point. At the same time, a number of traditional leaders started to form closer links for cooperation. This was a big step in overcoming former constraints and attendant, quite narrowly sectional perspectives. However, the road ahead was far more difficult than might have been anticipated at the time. The National Assembly resolution did not directly impact government policy, and coordinating the concerns of government with those of the victim groups turned out to be a complicated and often conflict-ridden procedure. However, apart from its deeply emotional and spiritual content, the Shark Island commemoration documented alignment between a range of victim groups whose ancestors all had suffered in the concentration camps. In this way, an important step was taken to transcend victim competition that in 2004 had been quite evident and obviously presented a serious impediment to joint action.

³² I refer to an informal talk with *Kaptein* Petrus Koper of the Red Nation, Berseba, 3.6.1995; on problems of documentation and establishment of facts, as well as on early initiatives by the Red Nation, see Hillebrecht 2013.

At the same time, the quest for restitution of the skulls opened a process that demonstrated the intricate web of stakes and of various claims for jurisdiction that come into play here. The negotiation process that finally resulted in the restitution of 20 skulls in September 2011 can be sketched here only in its most significant features. At the end of 2007, a joint declaration by Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders was released. The text indicted the German Government and the *Bundestag*, as well as the Namibian Government, for denying direct negotiations between the representatives of the victimised groups and the German Government, and it listed a series of measures to improve the lives of these groups, based on 'seeking redress for the wrongs of the past in order for the wounds to heal and for resultant genuine reconciliation and peaceful co-existence amongst the Nama/Ovaherero and the German people in our country and for a lasting friendly bilateral relations [sic] between the two countries'. The representatives of victim groups stated clearly their refusal to 'accept that we have initially raised the issue and now it should be *about us* and yet *without us*'.³³ The latter phrase was to become a watchword during subsequent developments.

The public disclosure in mid-2008 of the alleged existence of some 300 skulls from Namibia in various German institutions³⁴ marked a turning point in both countries, as Peter Katjavivi (2012) notes: 'For young Germans, who know little about the colonial war fought by German forces in Namibia, this news was surprising. For young Namibians, this news created a point of further discourse about Namibia–German relations. This has raised demands that the events of the past be more fully addressed'.

The event that gave a particular drive to the process was the screening of a feature in the German TV magazine FAKT on July 21, 2008. This broadcast helped to sensitise sections of the German public to the issue to a larger extent than had been the case before.³⁵ At the same time, the Namibian Government increasingly signalled readiness to accede to demands for lodging a formal request with the German Government for the return of the skulls, even though this at first took surprising and unusual twists. Peter Katjavivi, who until shortly before this turn had been the Namibian Ambassador to Germany, stressed in the feature that the Government would have to look into ways to force non-cooperative German institutions to restore human remains to Namibia (*Mail & Guardian Online* 22.7.2008; *AZ* 24.7.2008). The demand was forcefully reiterated at Herero Day that year, where the then Deputy Minister Kazenambo was among the speakers (*TN* 25.8.2008).

Consultations about the issue of restitution of the skulls evolved haltingly over more than two years, largely because the formal process also had to reflect a complex institutional constellation. This came on top of the intricate web of historical facts, of remembrance and

33 Joint Position Paper from the Nama and the Ovaherero People on the Issue of Genocide and Reparation, 14.12.2007; <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/pdf/2007-Ovaherero-Nama-Position-Paper.pdf> (accessed 23.5.2015).

34 The numbers claimed or given by various instances and authorities vary widely, a further indication of the urgency of careful and thorough investigation.

35 On the broadcast 'Koloniales Erbe' by Markus Frenzel, see *NE* 24.7.2008; for documentation on the feature and the following process, see <http://www.arbeit-und-leben-hochtaunus.de/Namibia.Reparationen.pdf>; (accessed 14.8.2013).

also of current agendas. At first, Namibian Prime Minister Nahas Angula doubted whether it would be at all proper for the Namibian Government to direct such a request to the German Government, since 'when the Germans took the skulls of Namibians for research, they did not get any permission from Namibians and thus it is insensitive of them to expect the Namibian Government to make such a request' (NE 4.8.2008). The spokeswoman of the German Embassy in Windhoek pointed precisely to the problem of viable actors and counterparts on the Namibian side: 'When we return the skulls, somebody must accept them and without an official request, we do not know whom to give them to' (NE 15.8.2008). Nama and Ovaherero traditional leaders insisted that the Namibian Government pursue the matter (NE 20.8.2008) and explicitly appealed to the Namibian Government to take up their concerns with the German Government (NE 16.9.2008; TN 23.9.2008). Some time later, pertinent moves among Damara were supported by National Assembly Speaker Theo-Ben Gurirab, along with an admonishment not to let ongoing internal disputes block participation. Gurirab joined this with a strongly worded demand that Germany honour her historical obligations (*Rep* 28.10.2008; TN 29.10.2008).

Eventually, the Namibian Cabinet reached a decision to formally request repatriation. The government indicated an intention to give the skulls a heroes' burial at Heroes' Acre outside Windhoek (TN 21.10.2008). However, this idea met with opposition from the victim communities. Two approaches were put forward: The first was the rather obvious idea to turn the human remains over to their communities of origin, presumably to be buried there. As observed above, such an approach would run into the problem of identification. To determine, with any precision, the community from which a person originated, let alone his or her name, would be difficult and in many cases not possible at all.³⁶ The second called for the building of a genocide museum in Windhoek to display the skulls along with an explanation of the rationale for their transportation to Germany, and possibly an account of the results of the research which was performed, along the lines: 'Did they really find out whether we are so different from them as they thought and claimed?'

Both of these approaches concurred in denying government the right to determine the fate of the ancestral remains. The last, arguably the more startling as well as potentially more controversial approach, highlights two main interrelated concerns. Besides publicising one particularly painful dimension of the genocide, the idea of the museum and the public display of the skulls was also meant to document the importance of the contributions of the central and southern regions of Namibia to the struggle against colonialism and for liberation. In the words of one of the main movers, 'The Owambos are thinking that they liberated Namibia, forget about the Namas. If the skulls are buried, our history will be buried'.³⁷

Such thinking underlies an attitude found in other contexts, such as communal commemorations in southern Namibia. They reflect a nested identity that not only

³⁶ Note that the skulls from Freiburg have only been identified according to region of origin. As was claimed, for lack of appropriate records, most of them have not even been ascribed to an ethnic group.

³⁷ Oral communication, Ida Hoffmann, Windhoek, 2.12.2009.

unquestionably accepts, but frequently emphatically asserts the Namibian national nexus, and at the same time highlights sub-national identifications. In a context that has been addressed as a 'multi-layered sense of nationalism' (Gibbs 2014: 10), a regionally and ethnically defined contribution to national history is brought forward with force, not to undercut the overarching national orientation but to assert regional concern within this broader context (cf. Kössler 2007a). This is not to say that at certain junctures, these identifications may come into conflict, when the question arises as to whether one or the other prevails.

Characteristically, in the early stages of the restitution process, considerations about the future fate of the human remains were linked to a vision of making the return of the skulls into a large mobilising event. This event would have involved a range of civil society organisations and was envisaged to provide the occasion for reconciliation with the German speaking community in Namibia.

Efforts to get restitution underway proved more cumbersome and time consuming than many expected. Traditional leaders took more than a year to hammer out their positions vis-à-vis the Namibian Government. Late in 2009, they finally petitioned the Government formally to act on the matter through diplomatic channels (*TN* 1.10.2009, 2.10.2009; *AZ* 2.10.2009). At the same time, consensus was reached that the skulls, once returned, should be housed in a museum. In the words of Paramount Chief Riruako, 'our history cannot be buried, they were beheaded in public, and thus we have to retain them in public.' Also on this occasion, 28 May 2010 was announced as the date when representatives of the communities concerned would proceed to Berlin to receive the skulls and perform apposite rituals before bringing the human remains back to Namibia. A few months later, Utjiua Muinjangu, speaking for the Ovaherero Genocide Committee (OGC),³⁸ underscored the importance of the spiritual dimension of restitution, since 'in our African culture, we believe in ancestral spirits. When those skulls come home, I am sure the spirits of our ancestors will rest in peace'.

Obviously, the ultimate aim of obtaining an apology and reparations from Germany also remained on the agenda (*NE* 25.2.2011). The date envisaged for the restitution was meant to commemorate the day in 1908 when the concentration camps were closed. Since this date related to all affected communities, no one would be privileged, as might have been the case with some other historical reference. A further demand concerned proper documentation about the fate of the skulls, including an account of the research that had been undertaken on them (*NE* 2.10.2009).

Negotiations between the various parties dragged on for more than another year. This involved negotiations on the level of the two embassies in Windhoek and Berlin with their various counterparts. Only late in March 2011, did the Namibian Government feel they were in a position to set the procedure in motion for the actual repatriation of skulls. One further reason for this delay had been the time taken up by scientific work at the Charité in Berlin and at the University of Freiburg, where skulls had been located, as they had to

38 Later, Ovaherero and Ovambanderu Genocide Foundation (OOGF).

be identified first as actually coming from Namibia, and as far as possible also connected with their ethnic groups.

Assembling a delegation

The ensuing developments once again underscored the fallacies implied by the actor constellation in the repatriation and reparation issue.³⁹ The envisaged date of 28 May 2011 did not materialise on account of conflicts that surfaced about the composition of the delegation that was to travel from Namibia to Berlin. These conflicts concerned the composition and representation of the 54 proposed delegates. There was a contest between a coalition of two committees, bringing together Ovaherero and Nama on the one hand and another committee formed by Ovaherero and closely related Ovambanderu.⁴⁰ The moot question was whether the 54 slots should be split between the two groups or between the three committees, taking into account the composite nature of the grouping of Ovaherero and Nama. However, the dispute also had party political dimensions, given the diverse allegiances of the two Ovaherero groups concerned, and it articulated a pervasive division among Ovaherero over claims for overall leadership by Paramount Chief Riruako, who relied on a one-time popular vote on the one hand, and the Royal Houses, who claim genealogical legitimacy on the other. The latter tend to adhere to SWAPO as the ruling party, while Riruako led his own, much smaller political formation, NUDO.

In this way, the issue of how the delegation would be composed mobilised deep and central conflicts, even though it was stressed repeatedly that the repatriation was a 'traditional' matter which should be kept clear of 'politics'. These conflicts were exacerbated by further competition among potential delegation members to be included in recognition of an individual's, as well as his/her community's, importance and standing. It turned out that time was too short to sort out these difficulties before the proposed date late in May, and the entire event was called off. Subsequently, it was rescheduled twice, until a delegation of more than 70 people finally arrived in Berlin, late in September 2011.

The run-up to the handover once again highlighted the difficult situation that pertains in Namibia when it comes to coordinating the diverse groups and individuals who are involved in memory work, and who hold stakes in the quest for overcoming the consequences of the genocide. Of necessity, negotiations with the German Government had been handled by the Namibian Government and the respective embassies. On March 24, 2013, the Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, Hon. Kazenambo Kazenambo, announced the imminent repatriation of the skulls and noted that his ministry had asked the traditional authorities concerned to form a delegation (*NE*

39 For the following see detailed documentation on <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/anthropologische-schaedelsammlungen.htm>; additionally, I rely on participant observation in Namibia during May, 2011.

40 Among Ovaherero, this division goes back to the situation prevailing in 2004 (see ch. 10); the committees are the OGC; the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for the Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide (OCD-1904); and the Nama Genocide Technical Committee (NGTC). OGC and NGTC work in close cooperation.

25.3.2011). In this way, the issue was treated as a 'cultural' question, and not as one that pertained mainly to foreign policy. The question of reparations that many always saw linked to the restitution process was raised at this time by Utjiua Muinjangué of the OGC and Ida Hoffmann of the NGTC (*NE* 25.3.2011).

A few weeks later, the OCD-1904 met on April 14 and announced they were sending a delegation of 27 members, including representatives of the Royal Houses, with the mission 'to perform special rituals' (*NE* 15.4.2011; *AZ* 18.4.2011). At that time, it was speculated that OCD-1904 would reach an agreement with the NTLA (*TN* 18.4.2011). From this, the conflict that was to break open soon after was already apparent in the diverging statements of the two Ovaherero committees. The allocation of delegates provided, as announced previously, 27 slots for the OCD-1904, while another 27 were given jointly to the OGD and NGTC. The reason given was that these two bodies had been acting together in the past. By this token, the entire delegation would consist of 40 Ovaherero and only 13 Nama representatives, which then was considered to be a skewed composition (*NE* 12.5.2011), perhaps a form of penalising alliances that both address common concerns and bridge historical rifts. Both the OGC and the NGTC protested strongly at a joint press conference and called for equal representation by 18 delegates from each of the three committees (*NE* 16.5.2011).

The Namibian Government decided to postpone the delegation's trip to Berlin indefinitely until the parties had resolved their differences (*NE* 16.5.2011). The arguments centred on who had taken up the issue of skulls first and whether OGC and NGTC formed two separate bodies or in fact a single one. The latter viewpoint was articulated by both the OCD-1904 and Minister Kazenambo; the Minister argued that the OGC and NGTC had signed papers jointly and therefore were to be considered as one body (*NamS* 16.5.2011; *NE* 3.6.2011). A further dimension concerned the seeming criss-cross constellation of party political loyalties, where OCD-1904 was staunchly SWAPO and OGC closely allied to Riruako's NUDO, and important spokespersons of NGTC were also prominent SWAPO members.⁴¹ This elicited claims that forging the OGC–NGTC alliance had been improper in terms of party allegiance, as well as the counter-argument that in a case like the skull issue and 'traditional matters' in general, party politics and attendant loyalties should be disregarded (*NE* 16.5.2011).

Eventually, the OGC and the NGTC acquiesced to the arrangement set forth by the government. Apparently, pressure was exerted and the possibility hinted that the Namibian Government might 'go and collect the skulls on its own'. This implied failure to perform the prerequisite rituals. At the same time, misgivings were voiced about pending preparations for the restitution, such as a proper Memorandum of Understanding, as Festus Muundjua (OGC) pointed out. Also, Uerikua Tjikuua, speaking for OCD-1904, deftly reminded people of the broader issues, above all reparations: 'It's not just the return of the bones, you bring the bones, but Where is the meat?' (*NE* 3.6.2011). Such remarks also reflected common concerns despite and beyond the pervasive conflict about Ovaherero traditional leadership that once again had broken into the open.

41 Notwithstanding that a number of Nama traditional leaders are members of DTA.

The row about the delegation's composition had brought home clearly the difficulty of harnessing societal forces, in this case traditional communities, to joint action in a matter of considerable symbolic, as well as political, importance. Immediately following the uneasy settlement of the delegate ratios, Damara King Justus ǀGaroëb also voiced a demand for Damara to be represented in the delegation. In a lengthy supposition, ǀGaroëb rehearsed the contributions of Damara to anti-colonial resistance and noted their specific sufferings. Not to be represented in the delegation would mean, in ǀGaroëb's eyes, to be excluded from the memory of joint resistance and suffering (*NamS* 13.6.2011). This request was quickly turned down by Prime Minister Nahas Angula. He argued that preparations for the trip to Berlin were now far advanced. Still, Angula stressed this did not amount to exclusion and left open the possibility to have Damara on later delegations. At the same time, it was announced that the repatriation would take place before the end of July, yet without mentioning a definite date.⁴² Leaving the date open on such short notice can be seen as indicative of the problems that still needed to be resolved before the repatriation could go ahead.

Diplomatic debacle – postcolonial enactment

On the German part, official actions were much less in the public view. However, the issue of restitution had been discussed in more arcane ways for a number of years.⁴³ Thus, even a quasi official, publicly funded programme, set up specifically for the purpose of restitution, encountered serious obstacles in attempts to secure not only the repatriation of human remains, but also the return of cultural goods taken from Namibia.⁴⁴ Such attempts quickly ran into the intricacies of the German institutional system and particularly, its federalist structure. Under this system, cultural matters are the preserve of the individual states (*Länder*). In the official view, human remains are not defined as such, but as objects under the care of cultural institutions such as museums and academic institutes. This in itself is at variance with much of international practice in the field of restitution, where there is at least a tendency to link repatriation to the idea that human remains are fundamentally different from other 'objects'.⁴⁵ As long as there is no clear decision in this regard in Germany, it is the state governments who claim responsibility.

42 *NE* 25.6.2011; for the wider implication of this issue, see chapters 2 & 9.

43 One important venue was the AACRLS programme which was funded through the German parastatal agency, GTZ, but under a Namibian steering committee; I refer here also to my own experience as a member of the small German/Swiss Committee (2007–2011).

44 Thus, AACRLS dealt, inconclusively, with writings of Hendrik Witbooi in Adelhauser Museum in Freiburg and the Witbooi family bible captured in the raid of 12 April 1893 and kept in the Linden Museum in Stuttgart; similar concerns were raised by Ovaherero oral historian Johanna Kahatjipara who mentioned ceremonial sticks, representing ancestors at the Holy Fire and kept in German museums (*NE* 15.4.2011).

45 Cf. Fründt 2013; Ahrndt 2013 reports that the German Museum Council (*Deutscher Museumsrat*) in its recent recommendation pointedly refers to '*menschliche Überreste*' (human remains) which semantically is close to '*sterbliche Überreste*' (mortal remains), a common and reverential way of referring to a dead body.

At the same time, however, these governments in their turn tend to point to the autonomy of the cultural institutions themselves.⁴⁶ In this way, responsibility is effectively confused, and legitimate actors are identified in fields far removed from formal politics and the affairs of state.

This situation has also spawned consequences for efforts to trace human remains. On various occasions, mainly in response to inquiries by German civil society actors, the institutions concerned have proved less than forthcoming. Frequently, they refused cooperation or pleaded understaffing as a reason for failure or long delays in answering questions.⁴⁷ In 1992, an early inquiry by historian Joachim Zeller met outright denial of possessing 'Herero' skulls by the *Kustos* of important collections in Berlin (Wegmann 2013: 404). As the German Government reported in June 2011, a query to relevant institutions besides the Charité and Freiburg University had yielded no hints about additional holdings of human remains.⁴⁸

This surprising claim was rendered invalid within half a year by the insistence of committed, freelance investigator, Heiko Wegmann. He succeeded in tracing three skulls of Namibian origin in a department of the University of Greifswald.⁴⁹ The approaches of Charité and Freiburg University, which in somewhat different ways have effected the return of human remains to Namibia, demonstrate that constructive alternatives are available.

Given the intricate institutional set-up, the modalities of the handover were negotiated by the German Federal Government and the Namibian authorities. In answering a parliamentary inquiry in June 2011, the Foreign Office confirmed this and highlighted the role of the various institutions, including the states (*Länder*). The Federal Government presented its own role as that of a 'go-between' (*Vermittler*), as far as arrangements on the German side were concerned. However, the Federal Government clearly assumed the role of negotiator vis-à-vis the Namibian side, even though stressing the Namibian Government's prerogative as far as the time table was concerned, and by implication, Namibian responsibility for delays.⁵⁰

In Germany an array of civil society groups began preparations for the visit of the Namibian delegation to Berlin. These steps included ways of showing respect, such as a Book of Condolences where signatures were collected online, and also initiatives to ensure

46 See e.g. *Landtag von Baden-Württemberg Drucksache 14/6265*, 14. Wahlperiode 22.04.2010, *Antrag der Abg. Dr. Gisela Splett u. a. GRÜNE, und Stellungnahme des Ministeriums für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst: Rückgabe von Sammlungsgegenständen an Namibia* http://www.landtag-bw.de/files/live/sites/LTBW/files/dokumente/WP14/Drucksachen/6000/14_6265_D.pdf (accessed 7.8.2013).

47 This happened in the case of the ethnographic museum (*Museum für Völkerkunde*) in Dresden which is known to hold a large number of skulls; email communication Heiko Wegmann, 18.12.2009; thanks to Heiko Wegmann for passing on his relevant email correspondence.

48 Answer by the Foreign Office (State Minister Cornelia Pieper) to 'Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Niema Movassat, Sevim Dağdelen, Annette Groth u.a. und der Fraktion DIE LINKE. Bundestagsdrucksache Nr. 17-6011 vom 30.05.2011', 10 June 2011.

49 Email correspondence Heiko Wegmann/Arlette Deutsch of *Institut für Anatomie und Zellbiologie, Universität Greifswald*, 9 & 10.2.2012.

50 Answer by the Foreign Office (as in footnote 48).

proper publicity for the delegation and their concerns. Civil society groups also organised a panel discussion at a prestigious venue in Berlin. In this way, it was hoped they could provide representatives of the Namibian delegation with a public podium and at the same time, an exchange with representatives of German political parties. There were also extensive contacts with the media.

Vital additions to these formal arrangements were informal contacts of solidarity and friendship in efforts to make the delegation feel welcome and ensure that their concerns and objectives were understood and supported. Many of the delegates experienced considerable emotional strain, and personal care and contacts provided by a range of activists and members of committed civil society bodies helped them to cope.⁵¹ Besides, groups in Germany also saw an opportunity to find a public platform for issues that are normally marginalised or ignored completely in the media.

The delegation that arrived in Berlin on September 26 was massive. As well as the delegates who had been nominated in the conflict-ridden procedure referred to above, it comprised Minister Kazenambo at its head, and journalists from the Namibian media. This underscored the importance of the event in the view both of the Namibian Government and of large sections of the Namibian public. As had been clear from prior pronouncements, the delegation pursued several closely interrelated concerns. On the one hand, the repatriation of the skulls amounted to 'repossession' (Biwa 2012: 271) in the sense that they were once again transformed from objects into bodies that had not only been deported, but had been denied a proper burial.

Accordingly, throughout the delegation's presence in Berlin, appropriate rituals were performed of which the deported dead had been 'robbed' by what had been done to their bodies (Biwa 2012: 262). As Biwa further reports, on the bus, going to the final handover ceremony, women sang freedom songs adapted to the situation (Biwa 2012: 265–6). In this way, they made a connection between the early anti-colonial resistance and the liberation struggle, acknowledging the contribution of the dead to the struggle against colonialism and welcoming them back into this nexus. Delegates also related their own activities to their involvement in the liberation struggle two or three decades earlier.

Linked to the central concerns regarding the human remains, was the desire of both Namibian delegates and German civil society actors to make use of the presence of the large Namibian delegation to raise awareness among the German public about the genocide of 1904–08 and related issues. A number of delegates on personal initiative used contacts with the German media personnel who were present throughout the delegation's visit. Over and above this, there had been an expectation among delegates to meet with German officials and to have a chance to put their case before them. Such hopes were linked to the supposition that it was a foregone conclusion that the necessary papers would be signed at the handover ceremony by representatives of the two governments. From this perspective it is understandable that delegates experienced serious dismay when they learned, only upon

⁵¹ The importance of this dimension has been stressed by participants in conversations with this author, Windhoek, February and March 2012.

stepping out of the airport in Berlin, that the German Government was not prepared to sign these papers.

As it turned out, this was not the only snub the delegation had to sustain. Generally, the high-profile approach so much in evidence on the Namibian side was in stark contrast to the attitude taken by the German Government. In the view of many, the official German conduct during the delegation's visit amounted to a communication disaster. It became clear from the outset that official German pronouncements painstakingly avoided the term 'genocide'. A press statement by the Foreign Office on the day of the delegation's arrival took this official approach to the point of outright occlusion. The statement merely mentioned 'skulls of deceased members of the population groups of Herero and Nama brought to Germany during colonial times'.⁵² In this way, the genocide and even the colonial war or any form of violence connected with the deportation of the skulls was excluded from the language employed by the German Government. Any reader who had been unaware of the actual issues would never think of war, genocide or atrocities involved.⁵³

In addition, the German Government was less than forthcoming in acknowledging the delegation or in engaging them in exchanges. The Namibian Minister was not given an official reception.⁵⁴ Furthermore, German officialdom as well as the parties of the governing coalition virtually boycotted all events connected with the repatriation of the skulls except the official handover ceremony, which came at the end of an array of functions. This virtual boycott concerned in particular the panel discussion, organised by civil society groups at the centrally located and quite prestigious *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (the House of Cultures of the World) in central Berlin. Representatives of the German Government or of the coalition parties had all been invited but did not attend. In this way, the podium was left to delegates from Namibia and representatives of the German opposition parties.⁵⁵

Even more importantly, there was a conspicuous absence of all invited German VIPs save Wiczorek-Zeul at the memorial service conducted by Bishop Zephania Kameeta of the ELCRN, at the *Matthäuskirche* in central Berlin. This church was a venue of considerable symbolic meaning since here the prophetic martyr of the Confessing Church in Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the mainstays of prophetic theology in the anti-Apartheid

52 *Pressemitteilung: Übergabe und Rückführung von Schädeln verstorbener Angehöriger der Volksgruppen Herero und Nama aus Namibia* (27.9.2011) http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_599AF8AB5706903D8C42417691EF7B18/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2011/110928-%C3%9Cbergabe-Sch%C3%A4del-Herero-Nama.html (accessed 13.10.2011).

53 In 2011, the direct connections between the skulls and the genocide seemed obvious to most actors, and this link was reaffirmed by studies on the provenance of the human remains; on the more intricate position concerning the 2014 repatriation, see below.

54 Unofficially, it was claimed later that the Namibian delegation had failed to adhere to proper procedure and protocol. Generally, accounts of preparatory negotiations by participants from both sides, which at least in part need to be treated confidentially, are diametrically opposed in a truly breath-taking way.

55 *taz* 29.11.2011; the German Government later claimed that the Namibian Government had been solely responsible for the visit and that no special invitations or requests had been made; *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Niema Movassat, Wolfgang Gehrke, Christine Buchholz, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE – Drucksache 17/7741 – Umstände der Rückführung von Gebeinen von Opfern deutscher Kolonialverbrechen nach Namibia und die Entschuldigungs- und Versöhnungsfrage, Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 17/8057*, 1.12.2011.

struggle, had been ordained in 1931.⁵⁶ The service blended elements of funerals as held in Namibia, in particular appropriate hymns, and reflections of the need for reconciliation and truth telling. In his sermon, Bishop Kameeta (2011) summarised what was happening by saying, 'We have started the funeral of people who were thrown away like dogs. We are part of a historic and divine occasion . . . this is a life-changing event, this is just the beginning.' Referring to the liberating language of the book of Exodus, Kameeta further joined an appeal to Namibians to 'take the sandals of tribal and political division off for the honour of the ancestors' to work jointly for the unity of Namibia, with another appeal to Germans 'to take off your sandals of indifference, insensitivity and denial of the events, take moral and ethical responsibility for what happened. Speak and act unambiguously. This will be liberating and healing for Germans and Namibians'. Sadly, the absence of German officialdom confirmed exactly the attitudes Kameeta was appealing to them to overcome.

As mentioned, serious disappointment and resentment among the delegation resulted from the announcement that the restitution document would not be signed at the core ceremony by the Namibian Minister of Culture and by a German Cabinet Minister, but rather by a representative of the Charité, on the German side. This was motivated by considerations of German cultural federalism.⁵⁷ Among the Namibian delegation, at least some members seriously considered leaving for home without the skulls, to underscore in this way German responsibility and the German Government's failure to live up to it.⁵⁸ Eventually, the delegation decided that Esther Moombolah-!Goagoses, Head of the National Museum of Namibia and representative of the Namibian Heritage Council, should be the signatory (Biwa 2012: 264).

The anger and anguish felt by delegates in Berlin was replicated by sentiments in Windhoek. Here, Ovaherero, Ovambanderu and Nama marched on the German Embassy. The demonstrators presented a petition that reflected their deep frustration and anger at the behaviour of the German Government. The petition can be read as an expression of the consequences that arise from failure to deal openly and address legitimate concerns (NE 3.11.2011). Thus, the petitioners lashed out at the German Government for withholding the names of the dismembered bodies as well as the burial sites of the headless bodies.

As has been shown above, it is a side of the colonial violence that brought the heads to Germany that such obvious and legitimate quests are very difficult, if not impossible to fulfil. It would be incumbent in an approach of dialogue and trust-building to address this predicament openly and take responsibility. There was reason for the petitioners to insist that the German Government 'treat the Namibian Government as equal partners and Namibian citizens as equal members of the human race' (NE 3.11.2011).

56 This connection was highlighted in Bishop Kameeta's sermon (2011). Since the entire handover process had been organised at very short notice, this author was unable to attend events after September 28; an extensive account is provided by Biwa 2012: 258–63, to which the following also refers.

57 cf. Cornelia Pieper MdB, *Staatsministerin im Auswärtigen Amt* to Yvonne Ploetz MdB, *Schriftliche Fragen für den Monat Oktober 2011, Fragen Nr. 10-14-16, 12.10.2011*; see also *supra*.

58 *NamS* 30.11.2011; also *taz* 1.10.2011; several informal conversations in Windhoek, February/March 2012, March/April 2014.

The unease and dismay that had been building up within the Namibian delegation coalesced with similar feelings among parts of German civil society who had worked for publicity and side events, in particular for the panel discussion, and had been in close contact with the delegation. Especially groups of Afro-Germans organised a protest at the actual handover ceremony at the Charité. At this occasion, the German Government was represented by Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Cornelia Pieper. As noted by some of the German press, Pieper was the only one on this occasion to speak in German.⁵⁹ Once again, she evaded the term genocide in her speech, but she acknowledged 'atrocities' by Germans and the suffering of Ovaherero, Nama and Damara. She also asked for 'reconciliation,' and thanked German civil society for their efforts. However, Pieper reiterated the stance of the Federal Government about development cooperation and the *Bundestag* resolutions of 1989 and 2004 and mentioned the high percentage of Germans among tourists visiting Namibia. In this way, while mentioning some of the issues raised by the occasion she avoided the clear statement hoped for by many in the audience, in particular members of the Namibian delegation. Pieper's speech met with noisy demonstrations of displeasure and boos by members of German civil society who were present. The Minister had to confront raised placards calling for a proper apology and speedy reparations. The Minister then left the occasion hastily and in a rather unceremonious manner, not even taking proper leave of the Namibian dignitaries. This was seen as deeply disrespectful by the Namibian delegation, and in line with the German Government's previous behaviour. Quite a few among the delegates welcomed the protest by the German activists, but felt – some with regret – that their present position would not allow them to join in.⁶⁰

The dissonance that broke open on this occasion must also be related to the great symbolic importance that was highlighted by the delegation's prior actions on various occasions.⁶¹ For example, Ovaherero staged an improvised holy fire ceremony on a Berlin sidewalk immediately after arrival on September 2011, at their hotel in the quarter of Moabit, right in front of the bus that had just delivered them. People in their traditional attire huddled around the fire, while biking Berliners on their way home took detours in bewilderment. Both at the first more private, familiarisation visit to the Charité on September 27, and at the actual handover ceremony on September 30, the group, and in particular the ritual specialists among them, announced their coming with solemn prayer, hymns and battle cries, according to Ovaherero and Nama custom. All this underlined the spiritual core of the entire exercise. In terms of transnational understanding and a postcolonial quest of reconciliation, this dimension was missed entirely by the German Government who stuck to their myopic vision of avoiding the 'g-word' at all costs, apparently in order not to set

59 *Welt am Sonntag* 2.10.2011. Pieper's speech is available on http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_1EB1F27ED6C2209F2C7159987D1048BE/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2011/110930-StMPieper-Rede-HereroNama.html?nn=597086 (20.7.2014).

60 Interviews, Windhoek, March 2012.

61 The following is limited to a brief sketch and partly based on personal observation; for more complete coverage, see Biwa 2012: 257–71.



Fig. 12.2 Protest during speech by State Minister Nicola Pieper. AFROTAK TV cyberNomads, <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/2011-Zeller-Schaedel-Rueckgabe-Namibia.htm>.

judicial precedent upon which a law suit might be based. As subsequent developments show, the cost of such an approach was and remains indeed a heavy one.

The extent to which the skull issue was an emotionally and spiritually charged one in Namibia, and became even more so in the process, emerged clearly from the welcome accorded the skulls and the delegation upon their return to Windhoek. At Hosea Kutako International Airport, the delegation and the skulls were met by a crowd of a few thousand who had travelled the 40 odd km to the airport early in the morning or camped there overnight. The crowd broke the police cordon and surged onto the tarmac, where *oturupa* paraded in front of the airplane that had brought the skulls and the delegation home. The runway had to be cleared for the scheduled ceremonies to proceed.

This was the beginning of a string of evocative ceremonial proceedings. The first stage took place in Parliament Gardens where the skulls lay in state for 24 hours, as is usual with state funerals. Afterwards followed a state ceremony in Heroes' Acre, where the dead whose skulls were honoured were formally declared national heroes and martyrs (Förster 2012: 36). These extensive and elaborate ceremonies underscored the emphatic meaning attached to the 'repatriation' (Kaure 2011) in Namibia. In this way, the Namibian Government made it clear that not only had it adopted the concerns that coalesce around the skulls, but it had

Fig. 12.3 Ovaherero youngsters on the tarmac at Hosea Kutako International Airport, awaiting the returning delegation with the skulls. (Photograph: Matu Hoffmann).



also taken over a large part of framing the ceremonial welcome. This meant in particular that the skulls had become a national concern as was attested by the turnout of the political elite for the ceremonies. However, communal concerns were not neglected at this occasion, as demonstrated by a range of ceremonies and rituals in various localities (Förster 2013: 424). Förster notes that in all of this there was a conspicuous absence of German speakers, who at other occasions make much of honouring the dead of the various wars (2012: 36).

Nevertheless, the Namibian Government struck a strong inclusive chord. Thus, Kazenambo Kazenambo stressed three weeks after the repatriation: ‘We are moulding one Namibia, one nation. So whatever colour: these are our ancestors! Even for German Namibians – these are their ancestors.’⁶² Together with the contributions by representatives of affected communities, then, there were reasons to see in these welcoming rituals expressions of ‘nation building “from above” as well as “from below”’ – as confirmed by the presence of many Oshiwambo speaking Namibians (Förster 2013: 431).

The skulls, framed as ancestors, were appropriated both by the Government and by the affected communities. Thus, Zedekia Ngavirue stressed that the repatriated skulls were testimony for the genocide and that from this flowed ‘a direct responsibility for compensating the victims of the German wars of conquest in this country’. At the same time, Ngavirue looked for ‘guidance’ from the ‘Namibian civilian government and other leaders’ to ensure coordinated and disciplined action in the future (n.d.: 10). With the benefit of hindsight, one may read into such a statement signs of inherent tension between concern about a unitary nation and the wishes of the affected communities. In 2011 such tensions remained submerged. The concerns of affected communities came to the fore in local rituals, but also in an insistence by traditional leaders on further negotiations with the German Government, for which they expected support from the Namibian Government

62 Ethnographic interview with Larissa Förster, Windhoek 15.10.2011; as quoted in Förster 2013: 424.

(Förster 2012: 428–30; 426). This tension was to break into open conflict in March 2014, on the occasion of the second repatriation (see *infra*).

Meanwhile, what had happened in Berlin had remarkable effects in the German, and to an extent also in the international, media.⁶³ Even before the actual handover, there was extensive coverage in the media. Namibia became top news, and even provincial papers carried lengthy, and frequently thoughtful pieces about what had happened in the former German colony. Thus, a gratuitous Freiburg paper carried a feature entitled ‘*The heritage of race mania*,’ placing the deportation of the skulls squarely on the road to Nazism;⁶⁴ there were long features highlighting the genocide. Many commentators considered Pieper’s walkout a serious blunder.⁶⁵ Furthermore, commentators acknowledged the need to deal openly with the colonial past and thus saw the repatriation exercise as a lost opportunity to advance in such a direction.

By insisting on formal niceties and legal considerations, and anxious above all to avoid by all means the utterance of words that might possibly be used in a legal case for reparations, German officials had missed completely what moved their Namibian counterparts – quite regardless of the possible inference that such painstaking avoidance attested implicitly to an awareness that there was really a cause for material reparations. Pieper’s speech⁶⁶ was a clear expression of this dilemma when she asked for reconciliation on account of deeds and circumstances she had not bothered or dared to spell out. Amnesia was replaced, in this way, by what appeared to be a half-official ban on a word or even on factual statement. As one German paper noted: ‘Those who fear to face up to the crimes of German colonialism should not be surprised to see racism today’ (*Berliner Zeitung* 29.10.2011).

Their joint experience in Berlin had drawn the Namibian delegates together, and after their return, there was even talk about overcoming the division into three organisational nuclei (Förster 2012: 36). However, subsequent local rituals staged by Ovaherero in Okahandja, Ozombu zOvindimba and Omaruru clearly saw the OGC and the OCD-1904 diverge (Förster 2013: 440). Furthermore, there were complaints about neglect by the SWAPO government for concerns of the communities affected by the genocide; such concerns ranged from claims for reparations from Germany, to a more vigorous and equitable land reform (Hengari 2011). It may have been such considerations, besides obvious dismay about high-handed German official behaviour, that prompted Prime Minister Nahas Angula, a week

63 Particularly for coverage by the German press see http://www.namibia-botschaft.de/images/stories/Herero/newspaperclips/presseclipping_rckgabe_260911_bis_041011.pdf; further: <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/anthropologische-schaedelsammlungen.htm> <http://www.africavenir.org/de/projektkooperationen/voelkermord-in-namibia/presseschau-links.html> (all accessed 13.8.2013). A full analysis of this material, while worthwhile, would go beyond the present undertaking.

64 ‘*Erbe des Rassenwahns*’, *Der Sonntag* 2.10.2011.

65 In this, one should not overlook the party political dimension and the current penchant for bashing Pieper’s party, the Liberals (FDP).

66 http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_1EB1F27ED6C2209F2C7159987D1048BE/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2011/110930-StMPieper-Rede-HereroNama.html?nn=597086; the Foreign Office homepage does not provide an English version but runs only a report of the event in English: http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/Laender/Aktuelle_Artikel/Namibia/110930-Herero_Nama.html (both accessed 20.7.2014).

after the arrival of the skulls, to come out with a strong demand that Germany respond to an official submission about reparations which the Namibian Government had made some time ago (NE 13.10.2011).

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – PERSISTENT DILEMMAS

The 2011 restitution could not bring closure. By its modalities, it opened a new chapter of painful and conflict-ridden proceedings. As far as these can be followed up below, they underline the difficulties in dealing with the postcolonial situation, as well as the political stakes and power politics involved.

Steadfast in denial

The diplomatic debacle around the handover of the skulls has dramatised the persistent stance of the German Government, along with its inherent contradictions and myopic limitations. The central theme discernible in the saga of the skulls, as in prior German Government pronouncements, is avoidance of a clear and unequivocal apology for the genocide. This stance appears particularly awkward when set against the recurrent assertion of a dimly defined ‘special responsibility’ Germany supposedly has incurred for Namibia (ch. 2). As it is presented, assumption of this ‘responsibility’ works as a pretext for ignoring pleas for a genuine apology and the dialogue that should follow from it. The aftermath of the repatriation of the 20 skulls clearly bore out this predicament – not least since the repatriation of further skulls seemed for some time blocked until agreement about procedure was reached between the two governments in 2014. This happened in a way that certainly managed to forestall the publicity of the blunders committed in 2011, but opened further conflict ridden issues.

From what can be gauged from publicised material, Namibian–German relations seem to have soured even during the handover. To all appearances, a Namibian Cabinet Minister had been slighted by German protocol. There followed a string of actions by German diplomats which are hard not to see as provocative.

At the welcome for the skulls at Hosea Kutako International Airport, German Ambassador Egon Kochanke was questioned about the disappointing formal treatment of the Namibian delegation in Berlin. According to a newspaper report, Kochanke said in an impromptu statement that ‘the delegation should not have expected the German government to take part in its “private activities” with NGOs and minority opposition parties’.⁶⁷ One may wonder what the response of German officialdom would be to a comparable attitude

⁶⁷ TN 5.10.2013. This is of course at variance with the reasons given by the government a few weeks later, see fn. 69.

taken by any African government. Discrimination on account of political leanings is not generally regarded as part of good governance.

A few weeks later, on the occasion of the signing of a N\$ 660 million co-operation and financing agreement between the Namibian and the German governments, the Ambassador added insult to injury when he stated: 'Despite the negative impression the huge Namibian delegation made in Berlin due to their hidden agenda, I do hope that the commemoration of the return of the skulls at Heroes' Acre in October and the forward-looking speech by President Hifikepunye Pohamba will set the coordinates for both governments: looking into the future for the development of this country on one hand, without neglecting the burdens of the common past on the other' (TN 17.11.2011).

In this way, the ambassador set himself up as arbiter of the 'negative impression' given by the delegation. The German press overwhelmingly had reported a 'negative impression' given by the German Government and in particular, by Minister of State Pieper and her walk-out. Moreover, it never became clear what exactly Kochanke had in mind with insinuating a 'hidden agenda'. One conjecture might be that he referred to the unanimous position articulated by the delegation throughout – before, during and after their trip – that the repatriation of the skulls, while important, could not be the last word in the matter, and that for them, a satisfactory apology, as well as serious dialogue and finally also reparations, remained a necessity. This agenda, however, was by no means 'hidden', but openly proclaimed in many public statements.

Thus, Utjiua Muinjanguue of the OGC stated to a German daily very clearly the position that by and large had been common ground in Namibia – except among some German speaking stalwarts – for a few years: 'Reparations are our final objective, but right now we ask the German Government to say: As the present German Government, we acknowledge that the German Government at that time has committed atrocities, and that it gives an official apology to us, and that they then discuss with us how this may be resolved and repaired' (taz 29.9.2011). The Ambassador could have taken note of this straightforward and open agenda which moreover complies fully with principles of reconciliation.⁶⁸ As it stands, the Ambassador's intervention and his desultory and disdainful wording further exacerbated an already tense situation. Such language hardly befitted diplomatic demeanour.

The matter was clarified to a certain extent when in a question and answer plenary session of the *Bundestag*, Left Party deputy Niema Movassat directed pertinent questions at the Foreign Ministry, specifically State Minister Werner Hoyer, at the time widely considered as the chief foreign relations expert within the ministry and the liberal party.⁶⁹ Hoyer found fault in that 'the Namibian delegation . . . even though only in part, had

⁶⁸ See the exposition in ch. 11; also Doxtader & Villa-Vicencio 2004.

⁶⁹ For the following, see *Deutscher Bundestag, 17. Wahlperiode, 145. Sitzung, Berlin, Mittwoch, den 30. November 2011*, pp. 17262B-17264B; bracketed numbers in this paragraph refer to these minutes. For an English report, see TN 16.12.2.

raised demands for compensation',⁷⁰ despite the fact that, as he claimed, 'the Namibian government gave repeated assurances that the sole purpose of the visit was the repatriation of the skulls' (17262B). In this way, the State Minister emphasised his government's conviction that the skulls could be decontextualized from the circumstances of their deportation and procurement under German colonialism during an on-going genocide. He further expected the victim groups represented in the delegation to see this the same way, and to comply.

Furthermore, the State Minister's answer by implication confirmed that the German Government indeed had exerted pressure on what the Namibian delegation might say and do while in Germany. In the run-up to the visit, reports that the German Government had pegged funding pledges for the repatriation on assurances that 'atrocities' would not be mentioned in connection with the skulls, had caused considerable excitement in Namibia and drawn instant disclaimers from the Embassy in Windhoek (*NamS* 9.5.2011, 13.5. 2011; *TN* 13.5. 2011). One commentator denounced such suggestions as 'blackmail' on the part of the German Government (Matundu-Tjiparuro 2011). The issue had also been noted in Germany (Trüper 2011). Phrased somewhat differently, Hoyer's statement now lent fresh credence to these reports.

Against the background of intense interest and activity in Namibia, Hoyer's next assertion was even more startling. He stated: 'I am quite hesitant to blame our Namibian partners in this matter, since they have actually been incited by organisations in Germany' who supposedly had 'used the visit . . . to force this topic onto the agenda' (17262D). This statement displays little knowledge of what had been going on in Namibia for almost two decades by then, and with enhanced intensity since the centenary year of 2004. By laying the blame for what he considered the 'wrong direction' of the visit (17262D) at the door of German civil society, Hoyer effectively denied agency to the Namibian delegation, once again framing Africans as the passive and mute objects of European machinations. Had he ventured to meet the delegation, he would of course have found that the opposite was true. The main concern of the State Minister's pleas once again revolved palpably around the fear of reparation claims. These, he stated in closing, had once and for all 'been disposed of in a dignified fashion' by Wiczorek-Zeul's speech at Ohamakari in 2004. Notwithstanding an awareness of 'historical burden . . . the theme of compensation (*Wiedergutmachung*) had thereby been done with' (17264B)⁷¹ – once again of course without wasting a second to consider or hear a Namibian opinion about this matter.

A prominent member of the delegation reminisced, soon after, about 'the community of the same inclination as ourselves' who 'had already organised for our warm political welcome to state our case in a panel discussion to the nation. We resolved to build permanent links of solidarity'. (Hoffmann 2012). Such solidarity requires hard work to achieve, but is

70 In the original, *Wiedergutmachung* (literally, making good again [what has gone wrong]); the term widely used (but deeply problematic) to denote compensation for Holocaust victims and generally, for consequences of Nazi crimes. See Hockerts 2001 for an extensive analysis.

71 The colloquial and offhand wording is worth noting: 'das Thema Wiedergutmachung war damit durch'.

premised above all on mutual recognition (cf. Kössler & Melber 2002; Kössler 2012b). Such recognition was conspicuously absent from Hoyer's statements.

Inasmuch as Hoyer believed his own story, subsequent developments should have taught him otherwise. Namibian agency was articulated in quite conspicuous ways, and claims for reparations were re-enforced. Before the year of 2011 ended, a 'fall out' occurred between President Hifikipunye Pohamba and Ambassador Kochanke during the latter's visit to State House.⁷² Reportedly, the Ambassador had deemed it fit to lecture the President about the Namibian delegation's behaviour in Berlin, upon which he was shown the door (see Melber 2013). Only weeks later and after the end of year break, this incident became public, along with a quite unusual comment by Namibian Prime Minister Nahas Angula. He spoke on the premise that 'the atrocities committed [by the Germans] are a concern not only of the communities directly affected, but to the entire Namibia' (WO 27.1.-2.2.2012). In this way, the Prime Minister made it clear that the Namibian Government emphatically saw the problems resulting from the genocide as a national and by no means as a sectional or 'tribalist' concern. This statement documented the considerable distance the Namibian Government had travelled from earlier attitudes held less than a decade before.

Consequently, it is no longer possible for the German Government to claim consensus with their Namibian counterparts if they stick to the position of denying any idea of reparations. From this vantage point, Angula directed harsh criticism at Kochanke: 'As a diplomat, you have to understand the mood of the country where you are', obviously implying that Kochanke had failed quite spectacularly to understand the implications of the 'tragic events' of 1903–08. 'As an ambassador one should have that sense.' The Prime Minister went on to relate that in March 2011, he had 'told the Foreign Affairs minister [in Berlin] of the importance of a dignified exchange of the remains [i.e., the skulls]'. However, the 'Germans are insensitive in my view and they seem to have gone into a denial mode which is unfortunate'. The Prime Minister went on to bemoan that 'our people were not treated well' in Berlin (WO 27.1.-2.2.2012).

Where Kochanke had complained that the delegation had given a 'bad impression' and followed a 'hidden agenda', it now became clear that the Namibian Prime Minister had reasons of his own to complain, namely about the unacceptable treatment that had been meted out to the delegation. With his statement, Angula endorsed the delegates' explicit goals. The Prime Minister made reference to suffering that affected not only certain groups but the entirety of 'Namibia'. These and other statements foreshadowed a turn and a conflict that were to become apparent only two years later.

In efforts to mend fences after this serious and apparently lasting debacle, the Director-General for African Affairs in the German Foreign Office, Walter Lindner, visited Namibia

72 WO 27.1.-2.2.2012, also TN 3.2.2012; by implication, the incident is confirmed by the German Government's response to a parliamentary intervention: *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Niema Movassat, Wolfgang Gehrke, Sevim Dağdelen, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE – Drucksache 17/8934 – Besuch des Afrikabeauftragten des Auswärtigen Amtes und Aufklärung über problematische Gruppierungen im südlichen Afrika Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 17/9255*; for a good short summary of this and further developments, see Melber 2013.

twice during the first five months of 2012. During his first visit in early February 2012, Lindner made efforts to speak to a wide range of groups. Pointing to a new attitude taken by the Namibian Government, for the first time a German diplomat also met directly with representatives of the victim communities. Uerikua Tjikuua of the OCD-1904 couched this in terms of the Namibian Government acting as a 'facilitator' in a process between the affected communities and the German Government (TN 3.2.2012). In fact, such high hopes, which were also voiced in other quarters (cf. Hoffmann 2012), turned out to be misplaced. Lindner said he and the German Government were 'sorry' for 'terrible atrocities, bloodshed and racism', but he reiterated Wiczorek-Zeul's formula to ask 'forgiveness for our trespasses' and highlighted German ODA to Namibia and particularly the Special Initiative which had come in for much criticism (TN 3.2.2012; NE 2.2.2012). Moreover, as Uerikua Tjikuua remarked, this was by no means an 'official apology', which would have to be given by the *Bundestag*. In his view, Lindner's was a 'rescue' mission in a situation that 'could easily spiral out of control and end up in a Zimbabwe-style appropriation of farmland in the hands of Namibian Germans'.⁷³

Lindner's trip came a few weeks ahead of the decision taken in the *Bundestag* about two motions that called for acknowledging the colonial crimes, although with divergent consequences. The first of these motions had been tabled by the Left Party; some three weeks later, the Social Democrats and the Greens followed suit with a joint motion, which however remained clearly separate from that of the Left.⁷⁴ Both motions acknowledged the genocide and called for an appropriate response by the German Government. In particular, in both texts, Germany's 'special responsibility' for Namibia (so often invoked yet so ill defined, see ch. 2) was squarely linked to the genocide. The motions further called for various measures, including material compensation. In this respect, the Left envisaged a fund or foundation to be administered by the Namibian National Assembly, while the SPD and Greens sought an extension and strengthening of the Special Initiative. Furthermore, both motions advocated a German–Namibian Parliamentary Friendship Group as well as dialogue with Namibian victim groups and appropriate postcolonial initiatives in both countries. The latter would also include a proper search for and registration of Namibian human remains in Germany as a precondition of repatriation. In this way, there was much common ground across the entire parliamentary opposition of the day. Apparently, the tabling of separate motions was motivated largely by the systematic political isolation of the Left that is practised by all other parties in the *Bundestag*. However, given the conservative/

73 TN 2.2.2012; fears that particularly young people could no longer be controlled and might resort to violence along the lines seen in Zimbabwe, were widespread among concerned observers, as I found in talks in Windhoek in February and March 2012.

74 See Motion tabled by Members of the German Bundestag Niema Movassat, Sevim Dağdelen, Stefan Liebich, Wolfgang Gehrcke, Jan van Aken, Christine Buchholz, Dr Dieter Dehm, Annette Groth, Heike Hänsel, Inge Höher, Andrej Hunko, Harald Koch, Thomas Nord, Yvonne Ploetz, Paul Schäfer (Köln), Alexander Ulrich, Kathrin Vogler, Katrin Werner and the Left Party parliamentary group, German Bundestag printed paper 17/8767, 29.2.2012; and *Antrag der Fraktionen SPD und Bündnis 90/DIE GRÜNEN, Die Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und Namibia stärken und unserer historischen Verantwortung gerecht werden. Deutscher Bundestag Drucksache 17/9003(neu)*.

liberal government's parliamentary majority, it was a foregone conclusion that both motions would eventually be defeated. The German Parliament treated the whole affair in a low-key manner. In the first round, when the Left motion was, according to established procedure, assigned to committees, deputies did not actually deliver their speeches but submitted them for inclusion in the minutes.⁷⁵

During the run-up to the decision taking on these motions, however, there was considerable civil society mobilisation. Particularly the Left motion was supported by a small demonstration in Berlin. A public appeal initiated by a range of civil society groups entitled 'Genocide Will not Superannuate!' welcomed the perceived changes after Lindner's visit to Namibia and further pointed to the commitments the German Government had made at the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001. It called for a continuous dialogue on reconciliation with the Namibian Parliament and victim groups, and for a solid institutional structure, in the form of a federal foundation, to advance a postcolonial agenda in Germany, with particular emphasis on the genocide in Namibia. The appeal also called for compensation without conditions that might impinge on the free decision-making of the Namibian State and victim groups.⁷⁶ In its content and demands, this resolution was obviously closely related to the *Bundestag* motion of the Left Party.

Speeches in the *Bundestag* in connection with the two motions yielded two main conclusions. On the one hand, no parliamentary party explicitly denied what had happened in Namibia in 1904–08, but on the other, the inferences drawn differed starkly. Representatives of the governing coalition of Conservatives and Liberals argued that all problems had been resolved, mainly referring to Wiczorek-Zeul's 2004 speech at Ohamakari, and they underscored the high level of German ODA for Namibia as a token of compensation and an expression of the 'special responsibility' that was once again invoked. Furthermore, Christian Democrats and Liberals again pointed out that the 1948 UN Convention against Genocide could not be applied retroactively. In the initial exchange of speeches, Hans-Christian Ströbele of the Greens bemoaned the fact that former initiatives, including those of Wiczorek-Zeul, had hit an impasse, but did not delve into the reasons. Generally, the speech of the former minister was acclaimed from all quarters, and Wiczorek-Zeul, now an ordinary member, reiterated her concerns.

It was left to two comparative newcomers to establish some highlights. Niema Movassat of the Left Party insisted, in the first round, that as a consequence of the 'totally disrespectful' behaviour of the Federal Government during the repatriation process, relations between the two countries had seen 'rapid deterioration' (19358D). Accordingly, on March 22, Movassat highlighted 'constant German disgrace', and he also referred to the fact that Wiczorek-Zeul's apology, which he considered decent, had always been treated officially as a 'private statement'

75 The speeches appear in the *Bundestag* official minutes for 1.3.2012, pp. 19354A–60B; the debate of 22.3.2012 is on pp.19988A–95B; bracketed numbers in the following paragraph refer to these minutes.

76 *Völkermord Verjährt nicht! Aufruf an die Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages zur Anerkennung und Wiedergutmachung des Völkermordes in der ehemaligen Kolonie 'Deutsch-Südwestafrika', der heutigen 'Republik Namibia'*; dated Berlin, 7.3.2012; <http://www.africavenir.org/de/projektkooperationen/voelkermord-in-namibia.html>. (accessed 24.8.2013).

(19992B). Movassat went on to emphasise the difference between ‘development aid’ which ‘is always conditional’ and reparations: ‘reconciliation cannot be unilaterally dictated, but is attained only in dialogue’ (19992B). Green deputy Uwe Kekeritz took up the technical legal approach to the genocide issue taken by the representatives of the coalition. He stressed that ‘in the first instance, genocide is not a juridical problem at all. It is a human problem, an ethical problem and a moral problem’: From this, Kekeritz concluded that ‘we speak today also about the moral and ethical integrity and self-image of Germany’ (19993A-B).

The speaker concluded on an interesting note of current concern: An apology for the genocide by the German Parliament would, in his view, ‘send a clear, globally audible signal that crimes against humanity cannot superannuate’ (19993D). In the event, both motions were defeated by the coalition’s majority, and it remained the incontrovertible fact, as liberal deputy Michael Krauch remarked, that so far ‘all Federal Governments have held fast to their wording and to their assessment in terms of international law’ (19994C). In this way, Krauch implied an agreement on the level of official German politics to avoid the term genocide – so extensively used in this *Bundestag* debate – and to shun any idea of an open dialogue about reconciliation with Namibia and the victim groups.

In this way, it could be said that the parliamentary exchange, summed up and closed the first chapter of the repatriation of human remains on the German side, presenting a clear message and yet an ambiguous picture. The official line of the Foreign Office appears unmoved at the time of writing and nearly three years and a change of governing coalition later. What amounts to a denial of the genocide has remained the mainstay. Even though in the March 2012 debate, speakers for the governing coalition did refer to the horrors of the colonial war, they were careful to avoid calling it ‘genocide’. Once again, reasoning remained on the level of formal legal considerations. The opposition parties had clearly re-assessed their positions, while in 2004 in Germany, the Social Democrats and the Greens – then forming the governing coalition – had passed a parliamentary motion which, by skirting the issues and avoiding the term ‘genocide’, had caused considerable anger in Namibia. Now, the same parties were prepared to countenance and by and large appropriately comment on the genocide. The Left Party had consistently taken the initiative since the first motion on Namibia it had introduced in 2007. Almost five years later, the Left still stood out by its clear call for reparations, while the other two opposition parties were in favour of enhancing and reforming the ‘special initiative’.

Despite the considerable overlap and common ground regarding this issue, a constructive way forward remained elusive. Various speakers in the debate on March 22, 2012 had endorsed the idea of a joint *Bundestag* resolution of all parliamentary groups and also intimated that long-standing plans for a Namibian–German parliamentary friendship group, if put into action, might be helpful. However, it appears that this would require a different parliamentary majority.⁷⁷ Moreover, as could once again be seen from the response

77 The elections of September 2013 led once again to the formation of a ‘Grand Coalition’ of CDU/CSU and SPD; the Liberals were not returned to parliament. Although the new government has been in office for over a year, there seems little prospect of a change in approach to the genocide issue.

in the Namibian and the German media, Namibia cannot command attention in the German public mind in order to make pressing issues for Namibians equally pressing for a numerically relevant group of Germans. Interestingly, the *Bundestag* debate was noted in the international press in ways that did not contribute towards a favourable image of Germany.⁷⁸

The continuity of German official policy towards Namibia was underlined in dramatic form in a further diplomatic *éclat* early in 2013. On 5 February 2013, the new German Ambassador to Namibia, Onno Hückmann paid a courtesy visit to Prime Minister Hage Geingob. According to reports, on this occasion Hückmann ‘remarked that although Germany will not forget the colonial history with Namibia, persistent mention of the reparation subject could tarnish the “flourishing” bilateral relations between the two countries. He further called on Namibians to accept the call by the German Government for reconciliation in order to move past the sad episode of genocide’ (*NamS* 8.2.2013).

The Prime Minister’s response was firm and clear. He ‘reminded Huckmann [sic] that reconciliation is built on the admission of wrong-doing as this is the first step to mending the atrocities committed’. Geingob further pointed out that people had a right to free speech, in particular in such painful matters as those connected with the genocide and deported human remains (*NamS* 8.2.2013). At the occasion, Geingob also mentioned that the ‘special initiative’ had been ‘foisted on the people’: ‘It was a unilateral decision by Germany; it could have been better if there was a Namibian narrative to it’ (*NE* 6.2.2013). The Prime Minister’s response was echoed shortly later by the technical committees of the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu Genocide Foundation (OOGF), the NTLA, and the NGTC, in a head-on attack on the German Government’s attitude: ‘We wish to state it very clear [sic] that there is no way the German Government can hope to escape its colonial past in Namibia with empty slogans and clichés like “historical and moral responsibility”, “reconciliation,” “deeply regret the atrocities of the past”’. In particular, the ‘special initiative’ was dubbed a failure, and the committees underlined the need for a procedure where Namibians as victims should decide by themselves what needed to be done (*TN* 12.2.2013).

German spokespersons held fast to the set brief as became clear during the visit to Namibia of Social Democratic deputy Doris Barnett in July 2014. Barnett, who headed a delegation of *Bundestag* deputies mainly dealing with budgetary issues, declared that in Namibian–German relations there would be no discussions backwards (as quoted in *NamS* 10.7.2014; cf. *AZ* 11.7.2014). In this way, Barnett not only re-affirmed the current writ of German diplomacy, but once again articulated the assumption that it was for the German side to decide what should be talked about and what should be passed over in silence.

The exchange between Geingob and Hückmann summed up clearly the polarised situation between the official German position and that of the Namibian Government and victim groups, as well as wider strands of Namibian civil society regarding the issue of how to deal with the genocide of 1904–08. This fairly clear-cut line-up came about in spite of major rifts and contradictions, as shown in the difficulties bridging the conflict between the two Ovaherero factions, and determining the composition of the delegation in 2011.

⁷⁸ *Business Day* (Johannesburg) 4.4.2012; *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona) 13.4.2012.

Increasingly, a tension was apparent between the role of Germany as a valued partner and ODA donor to Namibia (Katjavivi 2014: 165) and the adamant official German refusal to accede to an apology. One indication of this difficult state of affairs was the conspicuous cessation of high-level official visits after President Pohamba's difficult sojourn in Berlin in 2005.⁷⁹

As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, such far-reaching consensus in matters of substance has not come by itself, but arguably by confrontation with the German Government's position. The pressure produced by the German Government's blunt approach may well have contributed to a closing of ranks in Namibia. If differences had been papered over for some time, they were to break into the open with the second repatriation of skulls in early 2014.

'Not about us without us'

The second repatriation of human remains in March 2014 brought into stark relief contradictions that, particularly in retrospect, were already present in the 2011 exercise. This time, there was serious confrontation between the Namibian Government and representatives of affected communities. The conflict revolved around the ownership of the process, and connected with this issue, addressed the concept of a national image of history. One may surmise that the confrontational situation that had emerged in 2011, and had seen the Namibian Government taking a strong stand at the side of the affected communities, had pushed these problems into the background. They returned with a vengeance at a time when the Namibian Government developed and consummated a range of high-profile initiatives in the field of memory politics. Arguably, these measures have changed the landscape significantly, and the results seem set to last for a considerable time.⁸⁰

After the restitution in 2011, the fate of skulls from Namibia held by German institutions, and particularly their repatriation, was effectively held in abeyance for more than two years. During this time, there was secure knowledge of altogether 35 more skulls at the Charité thought to be from Namibia, and another 14 in Freiburg University archives which in all likelihood came from Namibia. An additional three had turned up in Greifswald. As has been mentioned, it is suspected that further human remains from Namibia are held by other institutions across Germany – as surmised to be the case in other parts of the world. While a 'global movement for repatriation' can be observed (Fründt 2013: 335), effectively no global rules are available that might govern such a process. Therefore, each individual case tends to be evaluated on its own merits (Wesche 2013), and this is the gist of recommendations by the German Museums Association agreed upon in 2013 (Ahrndt 2013). These recommendations stress the role of countries and communities of origin of

⁷⁹ The visit to Namibia of the new Director General of African Affairs in the German Foreign Office, Georg Schmidt, in January 2015 may indicate a change in attitude. Schmidt was quoted voicing 'shame and regret' concerning 'atrocities' committed by Germany as a colonial power in Namibia. He also voiced a willingness to engage 'directly with the concerned communities at all levels' (AZ 19.1.2015, NE 19.1.2015).

⁸⁰ Special thanks to Dag Henrichsen for relevant discussion.

such human remains.⁸¹ They represent a considerable step forward compared to an earlier guideline for the medical profession which gave special attention only to victims of Nazi crimes and did not consider return, repatriation or decent burial.⁸² All of this underscores the unmapped terrain, fragmentary legal provisions and consequently, the considerable challenges to political decisions.

As implicit in the 2011 repatriation, it was understood that repatriation would have to be predicated on proper establishment of the provenance of the human remains. This process was consummated at diverse dates in Berlin and Freiburg.

On 24 November 2011, the situation of the 14 skulls in Freiburg was explained at a press conference called by the Rector of the university.⁸³ The Rector, the Director of the University archives and anthropologist Professor Ursula Wittwer-Backofen, who had performed the necessary research, explained how these skulls had been identified in the holdings of the Alexander Ecker Collection, mainly by a range of natural science methods. This, it was stressed, was the only available approach in the absence of written documentation. For this reason, it had been possible only to establish a likelihood of regional provenance, a far cry from even the rough categorisation as 'Herero' and 'Nama' that had been achieved in Berlin.

Obviously on account of what had happened in Berlin and what may have been perceived as chaotic and undesirable, the Rector and Professor Wittwer-Backofen stated their intention to go quietly to Windhoek and there stage a dignified ceremony to hand over the human remains. Once again, this plan had been conceived without victim groups or even Namibian authorities being involved. Since these groups strenuously protested against such procedure, the plan was quietly shelved. By mid-2013 the way for a dignified return of Namibian skulls still in Germany remained unclear at best.

At various occasions during the following months, the technical committees in Namibia stated that the procedure as envisaged in Freiburg would be completely unacceptable to them. Thus, the Nama and Ovaherero technical committees, when meeting Walter Lindner on his second trip in May 2012, 'cautioned Mr. Lindner and the Namibian Government that such repatriation should strictly adhere to cultural and traditional norms as "skulls cannot be returned by strangers" and stressed the continued involvement of the Herero and Nama traditional leadership and their respective technical committees'. The committees further insisted on 'a meaningful dialogue . . . for a speedy conclusion to the demands of the Herero and Nama communities'. In this way, the linkage between the repatriation of human remains and the further issues of apology and reparation was once again underlined. Lindner again attempted to bring together what to his interlocutors was incompatible: a denial 'that the

81 http://www.museumsbund.de/fileadmin/geschaefte/dokumente/Leitfaeden_und_anderes/2013_Empfehlungen_zum_Umgang_mit_menschl_Ueberresten.pdf (28.4.2014).

82 <http://www.aerzteblatt.de/archiv/38021/Mitteilungen-Empfehlungen-zum-Umgang-mit-Praeparaten-aus-menschlichem-Gewebe-in-Sammlungen-Museen-und-oeffentlichen-Raeumen> (28.4.2014).

83 This author was present at the occasion; see also *Badische Zeitung* (Freiburg) <http://www.badische-zeitung.de/freiburg/uni-freiburg-gibt-14-herero-schaedel-an-namibia-zurueck--52364152.html> (posted 24.11.2011; accessed 25.8.2013). On the Freiburg situation, see Wegmann 2013. In German universities, the Rector is the chief executive and representative.

war was a genocide' which meant there would be 'no reparations' or readiness to apologise.⁸⁴ Speaking as NTLA chairman, *Kaptein* Dawid Frederick reiterated his group's determination to pursue the reparations: 'Even if it takes us another 100 years like the return of the Nama warriors' skulls to Namibia, we'll continue to demand compensation from the German government' (TN 13.5.2012).

Similar sentiments were articulated in the aftermath of the Hückmann debacle in February 2013. Namibian historian and senior SWAPO politician Peter Katjavivi, also speaking as a former Ambassador to Germany, reminded the German Government that 'Germany subscribes to international conventions, including the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation] Convention calling for the return of artefacts, especially those of ancestral significance to their lands of origin'. Since German cultural institutions 'are part of the German societal setup and should be aware by now of the sensitivity involved in this matter', Katjavivi indicated that a more proactive stance of the German Government was overdue (*NamS* 8.2.2013).

Such reference to overarching norms and commitments that were in fact violated by a passive and dilatory attitude on the part of the German Government is reinforced by a consideration from a different perspective. The celebrated Article 1, clause 1 of the German Constitution (*Grundgesetz*), which directly obliges all state authority to respect and protect the dignity of humans – by no means restricted to German citizens – can pertain to the obligation to treat with due respect human remains and the descendants involved (Thielecke 2013).

Under the circumstances, it came as a surprise to many just how the apparent deadlock was overcome in early 2014. There was a snap announcement only a few days before a small Namibian delegation, led by Jerry Ekandjo, Minister of Youth, Sport and Culture, arrived in Germany. The group comprised no representatives of affected communities. Instead, Chief Immanuel IGaseb, in his capacity as deputy chairman of the Council of Traditional Leaders, was a member of the delegation. As mentioned by critics later, IGaseb had not advised anybody about his impending trip. Even more poignantly, there were no ritual specialists in the delegation, the importance of their presence having been underscored at various times by the affected communities.

In Freiburg, the 14 skulls mentioned above were handed over in a brief ceremony on March 4, and a day later the remains of 20 persons were returned by Charité in Berlin. As in 2011, Esther Moombolah-IGoagoses signed on behalf of the Namibian Heritage Foundation on both occasions, while her German counterparts were the Rector of Freiburg University and the Chairman of the Charité Executive Board. In both cases, the ceremonies were inconspicuous, if dignified. German media did take note, but the overall media echo in Germany was very scanty. The German state was represented by former Ambassador to Namibia, Egon Kochanke, in his new capacity as Director of the Foreign Office Africa Division. Both Kochanke and Namibian Ambassador to Germany Neville Gertze accompanied the human remains and the delegation back to Windhoek. The arrival there

84 Report: Meeting on Monday, 14 May 2012 between Mr. Lindner, the Herero and Nama technical committees; courtesy Hon. Ida Hoffmann.

was also not marked by anything approaching the scenes of 2011. The skulls were welcomed in Parliament Gardens in an official ceremony by the Government.

Conceivably, the way the 2014 restitution had been staged in Germany was intended to avoid any publicity on the scale of what had happened in 2011. This effect was certainly achieved. Still, the very short-term announcement and the actual date, apparently set by the Namibian Government, warrant questions. Had it been a few weeks later, it would have been possible to return the entire group of human remains from Namibia held by the Charité. However, some research on another 15 human remains still needed to be performed, so these were left behind, and a third restitution is likely in the future.

A completely open question concerns the as yet unknown number of human remains from Namibia still in German institutions, and for that matter, also from other places around the world not so far included in restitution efforts. For example, the Berlin Society for Archaeology and Ethnology,⁸⁵ legally a private body, has shown little willingness to negotiate the future of its known holdings. The unknown number and place of further human remains from Namibia in Germany also provokes the question of who will undertake the necessary steps to deal with the problem. The German Government in particular has not been forthcoming. Basically the same situation applies to a number of known objects in various German museums which have reached Germany partly as booty from war, and partly from other contexts.

In Namibia, affected communities saw their own government's approach as an attempt to marginalise them. This called forth acrimonious responses. For a short while it even appeared that the shared outrage caused by the short notice given by the Namibian Government about the imminent repatriation, and the effective exclusion of their representatives, might momentarily bridge the differences between Ovaherero factions. All groups seemed determined to boycott the ceremony in Parliament Gardens. In the end, the OCD-1904 opted for participation under protest. In his statement on the occasion, Chief Christiaan Zeraeua bemoaned that the 'treatment' received by 'non-state actors' in connection with the second repatriation was 'unacceptable to us as traditional leaders and the affected communities we serve', even though they 'consciously opted not to quarrel'.⁸⁶ However, OOGF and NGTC decided to boycott the welcoming ceremony. This resulted in many seats remaining conspicuously empty during the event. On March 5, 2014 a statement from Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders gave the reasons for this boycott:

How can we only be invited to decorate the local events when for the planning to fetch and for the fetching itself we were excluded?

We say this because these remains of our heroes and heroines have been robbed of the befitting dignity, respect and the requisite traditional rituals they deserve

⁸⁵ *Berliner Gesellschaft für Archäologie und Ethnologie*.

⁸⁶ OCD-1904. Statement by Chief Meundju Manase [spelling taken from the original], Christiaan Zeraeua, Member of the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide on the Occasion of the Welcoming of the 2nd Repatriation of 35 Human Skulls and Skeletons from Germany. Parliament Gardens, Windhoek, March 7, 2014.

and that usually go with fetching the remains of our loved ones, and which we were confidentially told that some individuals on the part of our government during the preparation of the latest trip said that the rituals were 'nonsense'.

The remains of our people have been spoiled by our own government and we cannot advise otherwise than to tell all our followers not to participate in ceremonies that do not respect our deceased, let alone ourselves as Traditional Leaders who should have an *ex officio* right to be part of such remains repatriations.

This statement articulated both the hurt felt among affected communities and their sense of being robbed of what they felt was their rightful relationship to the remains of their ancestors. A further, central issue was raised right at the beginning of this declaration: The authors described themselves as 'Traditional Leaders of those communities that have specifically been targeted by the Extermination Orders of General Lothar von Trotha, and who have initially requested the return of the remains of our people'.⁸⁷ In other words, the traditional leaders stressed the special position of Ovaherero and Nama as the primary and express targets of the genocide and also their own precedence as those who had set the repatriation process into motion. In 2011, Ida Hoffmann of NGTC regarding the (then) imminent first repatriation had commented that this meant 'recognition of the historical importance (and the restoration of respect) for the affected groups who gallantly fought the initial wars of liberation for this country' (n.d.: 5). Such views were now seen as squarely opposed to the Government's interpretation.

At the event in Parliament Gardens, President Hifikepunye Pohamba set forth an explicitly inclusive view of the repatriated human remains which he placed in the context of a national history. Taking his cue from the fact that this time, the repatriated remains included those attributed to 'Ovambo', 'San' and 'Damara' besides 'Herero' and 'Nama',⁸⁸ President Pohamba stated:

We particularly remember and pay tribute to the Herero, Mbanderu and Nama communities, who were either exterminated or driven into exile by the infamous Extermination Order issued by General Von Trotha of Imperial Germany. Thousands were forced to endure the harshness of the Kalahari Desert and some of them spent close to a century in exile, in Botswana.

I wish to point out that some of the human remains in front of us here today have been classified as belonging to our fore-bearers [sic] from the Herero, Nama, Ovawambo,[sic] Damara and San communities, while others have not been classified. This demonstrates that our struggle against colonialism was a national

87 The Second Return of the Skulls from Germany Press Statement by the Nama, Ovambanderu and Ovaherero Traditional Leaders. Speech read by Ester Muinjangu at a press conference, Wednesday, 5 March at Red Flag Commando Hall, Windhoek (dated March 4).

88 See Charité Berlin. Handover of human remains to the National Heritage Council of Namibia – March 2014 http://anatomie.charite.de/geschichte/human_remains_projekt/restitution_of_namibian_remains_2014/ (accessed 1.5.2014).

struggle from the very beginning. It shows, once again, that Namibians fought side by side in unity of purpose in defence of our Motherland. This should serve as a good lesson for our nation to always remain united.⁸⁹

In this way, Pohamba emphatically linked the recognition of those whose remains were received in Namibia as heroes and heroines to a strong claim to appropriate these heroic personages into the overarching narrative of a national history that stresses participation of all Namibians in anti-colonial resistance. The President's words resonated closely with the images that represent early anti-colonial resistance in the Independence Memorial Museum opened less than two weeks later, on March 20. As described in chapter 9, some of these murals convey the impression of a harmony and unity which the historical record does not substantiate. Quite clearly, the underlying narrative these murals aim to project includes emphasis on the idea of 'unity in diversity', even where the facts need to be bent to achieve such an image. This inclusive narrative is clearly at loggerheads with the conception articulated in the declaration of Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders on March 4, 2014. They cast no doubt on their allegiance to Namibia, but they did claim particular trajectories and fates for various communities, specifically for those directly affected by the genocide and explicitly mentioned in Trotha's proclamations.

Two important national events followed closely upon the official reception of the human remains: the long-awaited official opening of the Independence Memorial Museum on March 20, and on the following day, the 24th celebration of Namibian Independence Day. For many activists concerned with the genocide, these two state-sponsored major events took on a problematic hue. On the occasion of the annual 'Genocide March' in Swakopmund, deep discontent found expression in a call to articulate joint protest against the government's hierarchical way of proceeding. This event had been initiated by followers of Paramount Chief Riruako in 2008. The march marks the cemetery of the concentration camp which from late 1904 spelt death to thousands of captives. This time the march was framed as a joint protest by Ovaherero and Nama. Accordingly, placards carried by participants sported slogans such as 'It cannot be about us with out [sic] us', besides calls for apology and reparations from Germany. In this way, a leitmotif was evoked that had already figured in the joint declaration of Nama and Ovaherero traditional leaders of December 2008 (see *supra*, fn. 33). The protesters thus affirmed their stance against a top-down approach on issues of their deepest concern.

The memorial march, on March 29, 2014 covered the lengthy distance from the soccer stadium in Swakopmund to the cemetery and back, and was remarkable by the composition of its participants.⁹⁰ As usual in Ovaherero commemorations, at the head of the procession marched *oturupa* members, followed by women in traditional attire.

89 Republic of Namibia. Statement by His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia on the Occasion of the Memorial Service Held in Honour of the Arrival of Human Remains Repatriated from Germany, 7 March 2014, Windhoek.

90 The following account is based on personal observation.



Fig. 12.4 Joining hands: participants in the Swakopmund Genocide March 2014 – clearly Herero and Nama – holding placards saying 'It cannot be about us without [sic] us' and 'Reparation now'. Photograph: Reinhart Kössler.

Behind them followed a smaller Nama group, primarily made up of women each wearing the typical colourful patchwork dress and *doek* (headscarf). Equally eye-catching was a second, distinctly Nama contribution to the procession, a small brass choir which performed on an open bakkie (pickup truck) during the procession and later at appropriate times at the cemetery.⁹¹ While the march proceeded through the immediate outskirts of the Swakopmund city centre, people kept joining in; many could be made out from afar, from their festive traditional attire.

The ceremonies observed at the cemetery were also modified in comparison to events attended exclusively by Ovaherero. As a representative of the Nama traditional leaders, Ida Hoffmann, the chairperson of the NGTC, knelt beside Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako when he announced the procession to the ancestors at the cemetery gate. Similar procedures were followed at the three distinct memorial sites that exist on the large cemetery grounds, today guarded by an extensive wall. A mound of stones intended to address the Nama victims of the camp and a stone structure representing a traditional

⁹¹ Note however the reference in ch. 8 about the participation of such a band in the Herero Day celebrations of 1960, reported in *South West News/Suidwes Nuus* 3.9.1960, as quoted in Henrichsen 1997; see *supra*, ch. 8.

Ovaherero graveside have been added to the memorial stone unveiled in 2007 which commemorates specifically Ovaherero who died in the concentration camp. All three of these structures were visited in turn. The allocutions in Otjiherero were followed by church hymns in Nama. In a simple, yet symbolically impressive fashion, sharp protest against the tactics of the German and Namibian governments was thus linked to creative ways of alliance building. Only a few years ago, a public alliance of Ovaherero and Nama would have been highly unlikely.

Divergent versions of history

However, the bridging of old and time-worn rifts was not the end of what was articulated on this occasion. Both before and during the Swakopmund event, pronouncements and speeches expressed a clearly different view from the one put out by Government a few days earlier. As already mentioned, President Pohamba had invoked the repatriated human remains as testimony for his claim that Namibians of all ethnic groups jointly had been part of anti-colonial resistance as well as victims of the genocide. Spokespersons of the coalition acting in Swakopmund re-affirmed what had been said in response to the repatriation announced at such short notice. According to this reasoning, members of other ethnic groups might have fallen victim during the colonial war, but Trotha's proclamations had addressed Ovaherero and Nama alone. Therefore, these two groups must be considered the primary victims of genocide.

The Government's concern is to project a version of history which refers above all to the overarching, national frame of present day Namibia, and also underpins the dominance of SWAPO as the ruling party. Inversely, the affected communities articulated a claim to honour and respect the specific experience and the suffering of their forebears as well as themselves, and the contribution they made to the anti-colonial resistance struggle.

At the time, these interpretations appeared frontally opposed. Under such circumstances an important point went largely unnoticed and certainly without public comment in Namibia: the human remains returned during the second repatriation cannot testify to either of these claims. In the case of the 14 skulls formerly kept in Freiburg, provenance research was strictly limited to natural scientific methods and could only demonstrate that the persons whose remains were studied had lived in south-western Africa. In most of these cases, an attribution to ethnic group was impossible. In the case of the 20 human remains returned from the Charité holdings, historical provenance research established attributions to ethnic groups and also the year and place when and where the remains had been collected. In some cases, the circumstances of death and the names of the deceased could also be established.⁹²

These research results attribute the ethnic identities of Nama, Ovaherero, San, Damara, Owambo to the human remains returned in March 2014. At first sight, it may seem that

⁹² http://anatomie.charite.de/geschichte/human_remains_projekt/restitution_of_namibian_remains_2014/ (22.4.2014).

these findings support the official view of the Namibian Government as voiced by President Pohamba. However, the dates when the human remains were collected, as well as some of the known circumstances, yield a completely different picture. Only five of the 20 skulls or other human remains in question can be related to the Herero–German War with an adequate measure of certainty; some skulls attributed to ‘San’ were collected in 1911 and later, and thus may reasonably be related to the extermination campaigns of the time dubbed ‘Bushman hunts’ (Gordon 1992: 77–85). In addition, remains of two Damara women murdered by a farmer in 1906, and still other skulls were traced to people who died of various illnesses or were stolen from graves. The earliest year given for collecting human remains in this group is 1898, the date mentioned for three of the skulls.

In this way, the circumstances under which the human remains arrived in Germany, as well as their provenance, become discernible only in a rough and sketchy outline which still leaves many blanks. Still, this information allows glimpses of a fairly broad range of colonial reality and its inherent brutality and discrimination. In diverse, but particularly heinous and horrific ways, these humans fell victim to colonial rule and its practices. However, given the available information, it is inappropriate to address these remains wholesale as ‘heroes and heroines’, as President Pohamba did from a national perspective, and as representatives of the affected communities did from a sectional perspective. Such approaches risk stretching the idea of ‘heroism’ to the point where it collapses into ‘victimhood’ – with problematic consequences for any claims to African agency under colonialism.

The research results of the team at Charité tell quite a different story. The deportation of skulls and other human remains from Namibia during German colonial rule took place at the interface of two quite distinct processes. Besides the war and the concentration camps that spelt death for tens of thousands of people, there was the ‘collecting mania’, by which anthropologists and race scientists were driven – frequently also in close alliance with the military. As we have seen above, for these scientists the war opened a window of opportunity in a pursuit they had been following before and were to continue after the war.

Such insights point to the complexity inherent in the historical process that is not easily captured or reflected in heritage practices and public commemoration. This holds true in the face of an apparent official quest for heroic, unambiguous figures fit for presentation as testimony for a specific image of the national past, or indeed for any other concern.

In the acrimonious, if indirect, exchanges about the circumstances of the second repatriation, as well as about the content of the documentation on the human remains that were returned to Namibia, it became apparent how thin the line can be that divides two approaches: an articulation of sorrow and mourning as well as quite legitimate concern on the one hand, and the turning of human remains into objects, this time of interest driven politics, on the other. The risk involves an attitude of ‘seeing like a state’⁹³ in the field of memory politics. Seemingly, the modern nation state is in need of a unified vision of the nation, even though such a vision may be brought about by forcible means as an outflow of state-centredness and efforts at power preservation. However, opposition risks its own

93 To adapt the title of Scott 1998.

inherent pitfalls of bending evidence to suit fundamental concerns. Both parties to the conflict that broke open on the occasion of the second repatriation of human remains from Germany to Namibia might have more in common, albeit in indirect and mediated ways, than is apparent at first sight, or even apparent to the actors themselves. The conflict may be of more than occasional importance and turn out to continue for a considerable time. In that case, another barrier has emerged, blocking attempts toward a constructive way of dealing with the apology and reparation issue.

Only a few weeks after the second repatriation of human remains, one of the main protagonists of the skull repatriation, and for many years the principal motor behind the drive for apology and reparation, passed away – Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako.⁹⁴ The Namibian Government honoured him with a state funeral, in recognition particularly of his contribution regarding the genocide issue. Responding to the news of Riruako's passing on, President Pohamba specifically highlighted the Paramount Chief's role in sponsoring the National Assembly motion calling for a German apology in 2006. The family declined a burial in Heroes' Acre, and Riruako was buried in Okahandja, beside his ancestors, with a massive turnout of thousands of mourners paying their respects.

At a special service in Parliament Gardens, Pohamba noted that by initiating the motion in 2006, Riruako had 'demonstrated to his community in particular and to the people of Namibia in general how strongly he felt about the need to address the past injustices committed by German occupation forces in Namibia during 1904–1908', also pointing to the important role the late Paramount Chief had played in repatriating human remains from Germany (*NE* 30.6.2014). The government initiative for a state funeral as well as the President's pronouncements were seen by many as an effort to set right what was understood as a slighting of Riruako, since for many years he had been denied official recognition of his traditional office. At the same time, the posthumous honours, along with recognition of the late Paramount Chief's service, in particular concerning the genocide and the demand for redress, were seen as an effort to assuage the ill feelings caused by the circumstances of the repatriation of human remains in March.

Almost at the same time, the issue of situating the genocide within the overall trajectory of anti-colonial resistance and liberation struggle in Namibia arose again in a controversy around the new Genocide Memorial in front of the *Alte Feste* in Windhoek. Minister Jerry Ekandjo rejected a request for a special plaque to commemorate the sacrifice of Ovaherero, claiming that the genocide in fact extended throughout the colonial period, and therefore the memorial was also directed at all those who had suffered and died in this context (*Rep* 27.6.2014; *AZ* 27.6.2014). Such an interpretation highlighted the idea of an all-encompassing, almost pre-existing unity among Namibians, which would level out regional differences in historical experience, in particular those connected with the genocide.⁹⁵

94 For the following, see recent press coverage, in particular, *NE* 4.6.2014, 5.6.2014; *TN* 23.6.2014, 27.6.2014, 30.6.2014, and *Rep* 30.6.2014.

95 A similar controversy erupted from a controversial condolence letter by Founding President Sam Nujoma for Riruako, see *NamS* 3.7.2014.

All the developments discussed in this chapter underline the difficulties involved in grappling with a violent colonial heritage. Any constructive resolution of the problem depends upon a readiness for open debate on ways to construe a commonly acceptable Namibian memory politics and narrative of the colonial past, in particular on anti-colonial struggles. It is not hard to see that the strategy of silent denial underlying official German policy thrives on such unresolved issues. This policy is precisely structured to evade the fundamental issues that would have to be addressed and which are indelibly inscribed in the texture of Namibian–German relations. Countering such a policy will be predicated on debating and projecting a much more inclusive image of entangled history between Namibia and Germany.

Conclusion:

Perspectives in the Long Aftermath of Genocide

THE PAST IS NEVER QUITE PAST – EVEN LESS SO WITH A DIRE PAST WHEN CLOSURE PROVES elusive. On account of these features, the continued presence of the past and the elusiveness of closure, this book also ends on an inconclusive note. Still, some inferences can be drawn. Such insights relate to difficulties and contradictions inherent in postcolonial and transnational memory politics, and to ways memory contents have been transmitted and actualised. A further inference concerns the diverse strategies and goals of governments and non-state actors.

Namibia, particularly its central and southern regions, stands out from much of the rest of Africa by special reference to a colonial past that dates back a century or more. However, in Namibia, the colonial past is unmistakably present, not only in the form of buildings and controversial memorials, but above all in people's minds and memories. In July 2014, close to 110 years after the genocide perpetrated in the Omaheke and subsequently in concentration camps, the Namibian Government was grappling with the wish of descendants of refugees who had made their way into safety in what was then Bechuanaland. Their request was to be repatriated and accorded Namibian citizenship. The merits of this case do not concern us here, but this request is a vivid reminder of the festering wounds that haunt the posterity of the victims and survivors of genocide. The consequences, particularly of the flight of many people from the war across southern Africa and especially to Botswana, were also evident in a commemoration that brought together people of Ovaherero and Nama descent in Tsaabong, western Botswana, on September 25–28, 2014.¹ Such events underline the regional relevance and impact beyond Namibia, both of the Namibian War and of memory politics that refer to it.

As shown in the opening chapters of this book, the burden of the Namibian War forms an inescapable dimension of Namibian–German relations, and in important ways it shapes

1 *Rep* 3.10.2014; email communication Ida Hoffmann, 24.10.2014.

the way people in the affected regions of Namibia refer to their past. Mainly with respect to German speakers in Namibia, this past also shapes relations between groups who have been set off, or are setting themselves off from each other by language, ethnicity and race. As became apparent from developments during the year 2014, there is a pervasive quest for closure concerning a range of aspects of Namibia's violent past during its century of colonial rule. Such a quest came to the fore, for instance, in the response to the repatriation of remains of freedom fighters who had died in exile during the liberation war and had been buried abroad. The symbolic connections with similar repatriations in connection with the Namibian War are quite obvious, as is the concern for creating proper conditions to close a painful chapter in a dignified way.

Bringing about closure is by no means always in the power and purview of those who suffer from such a past and its consequences. This insight sums up important parts of the argument contained in this book. The conventional wisdom derived from psychoanalysis, that by confronting your past you will be able to overcome it, or at least deal with it in more satisfactory ways, apparently fails those who have to grapple with long-term consequences of large-scale violence perpetrated not necessarily against themselves but against those who have raised them and helped to mould their minds and souls. Not by accident, Theodor W. Adorno, in a phrase referred to repeatedly in this book, insisted on the need for 'working through' the past as an obligation of those who, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, found themselves not in the victim but in the perpetrator position (and at that historical juncture, not infrequently, actually were the perpetrators). Of course, Adorno's agenda was concerned with rehabilitating and in this sense also re-educating German society, which in his view had spawned crimes and horrors unheard of in recorded history.

By this token, a central issue would also be set right: in widespread reasoning and often in high-flying appeals, it is the victims of violence who are said to have been deprived of their dignity, even their humanity. Without diminishing in any way the suffering inflicted by violent and humiliating treatment, there is a case to argue that those who commit inhuman acts thereby forfeit their human dignity and will be in need of rehabilitation, or in the language of criminology, of 'resocialisation', since they have disqualified themselves thoroughly as members of human society. Otherwise, such 'working through' also pertains to the necessary lessons to be drawn from history, to ensure it will not be repeated (Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich 1967: 368–9).

There are therefore valid reasons to see it incumbent on the perpetrator positions first and foremost to ask difficult and even painful questions as a prerequisite for regaining dignity, or in more mundane words and geared to national and state issues, as a prerequisite for international acceptance. Such a turning around of conventional wisdom should not place in any doubt the primary need and entitlement of victims for redress and reparation, in the sense that all humanly possible will be done to alleviate the consequences of injustice and crimes committed, and in particular, to show empathy.

Such considerations provide some guidance for understanding the postcolonial situation that pertains to Namibia and Germany. There can be little doubt about who

in this relationship finds themselves in the victim and the perpetrator positions. These designations are more clear cut when we look at the imposition of colonialism and the crushing of primary resistance, than is the case with latter-day conflicts, including the liberation struggles in southern Africa, where attempts at assigning such positions often result in much more ambivalent configurations.

The plight of the victim groups and their reasons for insisting on proper apology and redress have been articulated clearly in this book. The opposed official German stance of denying such an apology with consequent reparations also has been documented here quite extensively. However, this stance warrants further reflection, given the same government's approach in declaring remembrance of the Holocaust, along with the existence of the State of Israel as *raison de l'état*, to be part of the core concerns of the German State. Such readiness to address consequences of the Holocaust may have come as a result of long debate and reflection, but even then this contrasts starkly to the disdain expressed in responses by top German officials to queries about the genocide in Namibia. Only in July 2014, a visiting high ranking German MP shrugged off the idea of reparations simply by saying one should look forward and not backward. In other words, she mapped out to her questioners an agenda that boiled down to a demand to let bygones be bygones.²

This situation remains deeply troubling, disconcerting and also shameful for committed German citizens, and I want to address it further before moving on to memory practices and associated politics. If we take up the idea that those who commit crimes against humanity position themselves, by these very acts, outside human society, they are the ones who, on condition of acknowledging their misdeeds, may be readmitted (rehabilitated/resocialised). This is the core meaning of 'amnesty' which is predicated on the admittance or at least establishment of guilt, or responsibility. Such an acknowledgement has clear consequences, even though present-day Germans are not personally guilty of crimes such as the genocide in Namibia that were committed in the lifetime of their grandparents, great-grandparents and indeed, great-great-grandparents. However, as has been pointed out in this book, temporal distance and personal innocence cannot absolve people from responsibility as citizens. Even less can a state, in whose name such crimes have been committed, slip away from such responsibility.

In Germany, this principle has been established as the fruit of a long and painful struggle over the 'politics of the past', at least with respect to the Holocaust. This struggle is by no means over, and the fledgling drive for countenancing the heritage of colonialism by German society as well as by the relevant state organs may be seen in such a trajectory.

Even given the century that separates us from German colonialism, there are clear reasons why the genocide committed by the German colonial troops during the Namibian War (1903–8) must still concern us today. The main reason points to the 'special responsibility' that has been noted officially by the German Parliament, but as we have seen, never clearly spelt out and motivated by German official politics. Such 'special responsibility', which has not been declared for any other among the former German colonies, must necessarily

2 *NamS* 10.7.2014; *AZ* 11.7.2014; and see ch. 12.

be based on a special tie or occurrence. In spite of the guarded official silence, it is hard to conceive that the motivation for this is not grounded in the genocide. Even if there are still claims – as was the case in 1989 – that a special relationship stems from the presence of a relatively sizeable community of German settlers in Namibia, the circumstances of the establishment of that community would (regardless of intervening further waves of immigration) still point back to the genocide. It was the genocide that cleared the land for white settlement in the country, both by physically eliminating people who had previously occupied it and by wholesale expropriation of the survivors.

Germany's high profile of addressing the Holocaust in her own dire past more openly than genocide and war crimes are dealt with in other regions of the world, would give reason to expect that such an attitude would also apply when it comes to addressing the colonial past. The complex and saddening processes concerning the issues of apology, reparation and restitution reviewed in this book show otherwise. In terms of the psychoanalytical notion of 'working through', one might say that in this way, memory content and responsibility are dissociated and repressed. These memory contents are therefore not consciously known and not available for constructive confrontation. Nevertheless they remain present, like a festering wound. To critical minds, this situation is not that different from the way the German State and society dealt with the Holocaust. The road that led to the present form of public commemoration has been bedevilled with numerous pitfalls and inconsistencies, with such instances emerging even in the recent past. An obstreperous attitude by German officialdom regarding the colonial genocide is therefore in accordance with its track record since 1945 with respect to commemorating the Holocaust. Still, the charge of racial discrimination is more than understandable where a mass crime such as genocide, committed against Africans, has not been adequately addressed.

A charge of discrimination may also be levelled on the German State and to an extent on the German public as well for the less than forthcoming behaviour shown when confronted with newly emerging victim groups of the Holocaust, or with demands for redress by victims of atrocities in countries occupied by the German army during World War II, most notably, Greece and Italy.³ Besides racist attitudes, the root cause may well be a general reluctance to face up to yet further dimensions of a dire past. However, from the perspective of 'working through', in an effort to ascertain one's historic position and to reach closure with victim groups, there is no other way than countenancing the whole ensemble of a violent history, which without equal has characterised Germany's past during the first half of the 20th Century.

Besides a long standing commitment to solidarity with southern Africa and Namibia in particular, these concerns have motivated small but active groups of individuals in Germany to take up the issues connected with the genocide in Namibia. In this quest, they easily linked up with the goals and concerns of Namibians who, in particular after 2004, had started

³ In early 2015, there was reason to remember the argumentative somersaults in denying responsibility for a forced loan imposed on Greece by occupying Nazi Germany in 1942. Quite apart from the issue of reparations, these obligations had been honoured even by the Nazi government which had begun to repay the loan though by no means completely (Kadritzke 2015).

sustained drives to push the German Government towards an apology and consequent reparations and to motivate the Namibian Government to join them in these efforts. It was therefore no accident that on the occasion of the first repatriation of human remains in 2011, ties were renewed and strengthened, and something like a tentative and loose alliance based on largely overlapping concerns was formed. In terms of active, if small and minority, civil society groups, an understanding could be forged. However this so far has proved elusive – at least when it comes to the issues going back to the genocide – on the level of institutionalised political relations. Given the adamant position taken by the German Government, a process that may lead to closure is still a far-off goal, but the activists on both sides, with joined hands, are all the more indispensable for sustaining hope that in the end, this goal may still be reached.

Given received ideas about reconciliation and reparation, such a process would have to involve above all an open dialogue on an equal footing. In this context, it would be incumbent on the German side in the first place to listen to the representations of Namibians. As has been documented extensively in this book, the official German approach so far has, in various guises and stages, been consistently marked by unilateralism, in particular by one-sided announcements of intentions or programmes, in addition to denial and refusal to accede to a genuine apology. The most prominent case in this regard is the Special Reconciliation Initiative, later styled NGSIP, which has consistently been criticised by Namibian activists and people on the ground precisely for its unilateral and non-participatory approach. Again, (West) German practice concerning post-World War II efforts at redress for Nazi crimes (*Wiedergutmachung*) differs starkly, as exemplified by West Germany's negotiations with the Jewish Claims Conference, where the needs and wishes of the victim side were given precedence, even in parliamentary law making (Hockerts 2001: 178–88). Without entering once again into the debate about whether the instances of Nazi crimes and the genocide in Namibia can be compared, or how they are connected (see ch. 3), it is clear that the (West) German Government has developed an institutionalised practice of how to deal with mass crimes committed under the auspices of its predecessor state. At least to an extent, attitudes prevailing in German society resonate with this practice. It is equally clear that in dealing with the issues posed by the Namibian War and its aftermath, this practice has not been referred to and has been ignored blatantly. It is hard not to see in this approach – as in other aspects of (not) addressing the issue of colonial state crimes and genocide – a discrimination that rehearses a colonialist attitude. In the experience of stubborn refusal and outright rebuffs by German officialdom, active groups amongst Ovaherero decided to go ahead with a lawsuit in the U.S.A. under the ATCA, against the German State and German companies that had business in Namibia during German colonial rule.

During roughly the first one and a half decades of Namibian independence, the approach of the German Government fitted easily with the attitude taken by their Namibian counterparts. The Namibian Government's reasons for objecting to the idea of reparations for the genocide were quite different from those that motivated the official German approach, being concerned with the unity of a newly independent nation that had just emerged from

war and still bore the consequences of the divisive stratagems of the Apartheid homeland policy. One may question SWAPO's anti-colonial nationalism on some grounds (see du Pisani 2010), yet in the volatile transition situation, there was a case to argue that reparations accruing to specific victim groups might foster 'tribalism'.

This official stance dovetailed with the image of a national history centred on the liberation war. However, important spokespersons came out with strong statements calling for a change in the official German attitude. Thus, as we have seen in chapter 3, Theo-Ben Gurirab, on the occasion of the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001 and in his capacity as Foreign Affairs Minister of Namibia, identified racist discrimination as the reason for the German Government's failure to openly address the genocide issue.

The sea-change in the approach of SWAPO and the Namibian Government occurred in October 2006 when the National Assembly adopted almost unanimously, with one vote abstaining, a motion that supported the demand for an apology and reparations by Germany. With this motion carried, a broader political consensus on the apology and reparations issue seemed on the cards in Namibia. Not only had the National Assembly passed this motion practically unanimously, it had acted on the initiative of Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako, sitting as a member of the parliamentary opposition. Since Riruako also had spearheaded the court action in the U.S.A., and for a long time acted as the prime mover pushing the quest for apology and reparations from Germany, the 2006 motion marked a major realignment between the ruling party and civil society activists in the field. One could also see an alliance in the making that would span the divides of party politics.

At roughly the same time, another realignment helped to overcome the earlier tendency for Ovaherero exclusionism in dealing with the genocide issue. Statements as well as overtones to this effect had been apparent even during the centennial year of 2004. Increasingly during the years after 2004 the situation changed, with representatives of other ethnic groups, above all Nama, coming forward. This became particularly clear at the commemoration on Shark Island in February 6, 2007 to mark the centennial of the death of Cornelius Frederick. The commemoration brought together an unprecedented range of representatives of various groups, mainly Ovaherero and Nama, reflecting the composition of the victims who had languished and died in the concentration camp a century before. Moreover, the creation of NTLA shortly before the Shark Island event had provided one body, representing a large range of Nama groups, which could act as a partner in the alliance that emerged during the following year.

Finally, the Shark Island event was also the occasion when the repatriation of human skulls brought to Germany in colonial times was put definitely on the agenda. Starting from the concern about the head of Cornelius Frederick that is said to have been severed after his death and sent to Germany, the issue of deported human remains from the colonial period came to the fore. These concerns coalesced in a joint request to the Namibian Government from Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders to approach the German Government for a return of human remains, mainly skulls that were still held in Germany.

The ensuing skull saga, as detailed in chapter 12, brought into relief important features of memory politics between Namibia, the erstwhile colony and Germany, the former colonial metropole. These features concerned communication gaps connected for instance with the structure of various levels of the state in Germany and their several responsibilities and prerogatives. Of much greater importance were the huge differences in the levels of attention that Namibian–German relations, including issues of memory politics, received in each country, and this remains a serious hindrance to genuine reparation of relations. The very low media profile Namibia rates in Germany is in stark contrast to keen interest and intensive reporting in Namibia on even minor visits by German representatives. One may, with some justification, relate this difference to disparities in size and economic clout, but official German pronouncements in particular betray a level of disdain that is disconcerting. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, such an attitude became apparent in the brush-off Ovaherero received from Chancellor Kohl and President Herzog in the 1990s, in Foreign Minister Fischer's denial of an 'apology relevant for compensation' in 2003, in a number of statements in connection with the repatriation of human skulls in 2011, and most recently, in 2014, in the admonishment not to look 'backward' by social democratic deputy Doris Barnett (*supra*).⁴

When, for a brief moment of high drama, the German media did pay more attention to Namibia than usual (in September/October 2011), the media response was very different from the Government's. This critical stance vis-à-vis government policy, once an active public has been alerted, may hold out hope for possible changes in this situation. For all its ambivalence, Wieczorek-Zeul's speech at Ohamakari in 2004 and its resonance in Germany may point to possible avenues that have not been followed up, and in this way, to chances for true reconciliation that have been thwarted. Sadly, former German President Horst Köhler explicitly acknowledged German responsibility for the genocide only years after resigning from his office, when he lashed out at Europeans' 'comfortable hypocrisy vis-à-vis their past and present contribution to Africa's problems'. Köhler also critiqued more generally the 'double standards' adhered to by Europe in dealing with Africa (*NamS* 26.5.2014). While during his tenure as German President (2004–10), Köhler was known for his interest and commitment concerning Africa, he never before had been as outspoken. One might wish he had articulated his recent views while still head of state, but it is doubtful that, given the constraints of a largely representative office, he was then in a position to do so.

In Namibia, the high level of commitment to issues linked to coming to terms with the genocide was attested by the welcome the skulls received in Windhoek in 2011. Emotions ran high on what many saw as a return of ancestors that had been denied proper burial and closure. Over and above this, the occasion re-affirmed a level of concern with the colonial past that had surfaced, in similar forms, in 2004 when the centenary of the genocide was

4 It remains to be seen whether indications such as the visit of General Director of African Affairs in the German Foreign Office, Georg Schmidt, to Windhoek in late January 2015 will mark a change; see also the closing paragraph of this Conclusion.

commemorated. This time, it also became apparent that such concerns went far beyond the directly affected groups and touched Namibians of quite diverse backgrounds. The Namibian Government took a much more active and high profile role in 2011 than it had in 2004. The overall reluctance on the side of government for public engagement at the former occasion contrasted sharply with the situation in 2011, when state honours were conferred on the repatriated skulls. Furthermore, the large delegation that went to Berlin did so under government auspices. In a longer trajectory, and from the – inevitably transitory – vantage point of early 2015, this high moment of apparent unity in remembrance, and of paying respect to what was seen as the remains of heroes and heroines of anti-colonial resistance, was more fraught with contradictions than many may have gauged at the time.

At first sight, the issue of deported human remains and the need to repatriate them after more than a century might have appeared above all as a moral imperative, which could be expected to help bridge differences that persisted in other aspects of memory politics and in politics more generally. The recurrent appeal heard in Namibia to keep ‘politics’ – in the sense of party politics – out of these matters underlines this expectation or hope for common ground. As has been detailed in chapter 12, such hopes have proved elusive. All these endeavours confronted the insistence of German officialdom on due process, not only in the sense of observing the rules of the diplomatic game and of Germany’s institutional set-up but more importantly, at each turn the basic writ in the German official approach was to avoid any naming or mentioning of the genocide. This attitude flies in the face of the principles of reconciliation. However, rifts amongst the Namibian actors also came to the fore, in particular in connection with the second repatriation in March 2014.

This time the repatriation fell into line – if somewhat uneasily – with an array of further government activities in the field of memory politics that also involved far-reaching changes in Windhoek’s memory landscape. Drastic change pertained to the closely interconnected instances of the removal of the Rider statue, the erection of memorials to Sam Nujoma and the genocide, and the long-awaited opening of the Independence Memorial Museum. Taken together, these changes projected anti-colonial content that had been missing in central Windhoek for almost a quarter century of independence. At the same time, the removal of the Rider statue was seen in some German speaking quarters as a deeply unsettling move bordering on blasphemy. Such criticism could only reconfirm the chasm that exists, when it comes to talking about the colonial past, between vociferous spokespersons from that group and arguably a majority of Namibians. Regarding the new memorials and the museum, critical debate was pegged more on the artistic merits or demerits, or on the North Korean origins of the entire ensemble of the memorials and the museum, than on the messages that the new additions convey quite clearly. These, however, merit a brief reflection as a guideline for understanding the recent thrust of government activity in the memory field, and more particularly the Namibian Government’s attitude to the second skull repatriation which drew heavy criticism from victim groups.

The Independence Memorial Museum conveys and reconfirms a strong overall emphasis on the military dimension of the liberation struggle, much along the lines of Heroes’ Acre

and other memorials outside Windhoek. However, a second strand emerges from the representations of pre-colonial life and primary anti-colonial resistance, namely a somewhat forced insistence on national unity. This unity is represented not as a process that was driven by colonial boundaries and the exigencies of anti-colonial resistance, but more or less as a given from the beginning. In the same way, the genocide memorial was given, according to official pronouncements a few months after its unveiling, a meaning that claimed to embrace all the victims of the entire colonial period, which was then presented as a continuous period of genocide.

One may question the wisdom of stretching a controversial concept to such an extent, but the message contained in this effort seems more important. Such claims refer to a uniform image of processes that in fact were complex and contradictory, as partly reflected in this book. An understanding of this approach can help to explain the difficulties that have arisen in Namibia in connection with the second repatriation of human remains from Germany and which form the final point of this book's account. This last turn has alerted observers to the ongoing efforts to negotiate the past that are taking place or that may still be outstanding within Namibia. However, such efforts and conflicts should not be conflated with the painful negotiation of memory that is still outstanding between Namibia and Germany.

As we have seen, the second repatriation of human remains from Germany in 2014 was orchestrated in quite a different way in contrast to the first occasion in 2011. There may have been considerations in the arrangements reached between the Namibian and the German Governments that at this point are more or less open to speculation and should be left there. Still, the haste with which the whole operation got underway and was carried through can hardly be understood as anything other than an attempt to avoid the kind of publicity that marked the presence of the large delegation and the handover of skulls in 2011. It should be remembered that much of the negative emotions this procedure aroused in the affected communities in 2014 revolved around their exclusion and the absence of ritual specialists – matters that had been debated within the Namibian public sphere two years before. It is hard not to suspect behind this an open slighting of the affected communities, as these were more or less arcane considerations of the state.

In this way, the occasion tore open a pre-existing structural rift between the government and the affected communities – a rift that was bridged successfully on earlier occasions. The underlying problem was articulated in countervailing claims as to the actual meaning of the repatriated human remains. Both the claim that these remains attest to a unified resistance struggle of all Namibians, as the President and more generally the Government would have it, and the view that these human remains testify to the contribution and suffering specifically of Ovaherero and Nama, the target of Trotha's annihilation proclamations, do not stand up to the evidence supplied regarding these remains. Rather, they speak to the brutality both of colonialism and of a science driven by basic racist assumptions – which does not diminish the crimes involved, and of course must not distract from the issue of genocide.

The last moves of the Namibian Government that can be reflected here give one reason to expect that the issue will not be dropped or smothered in an all-encompassing account

of colonial oppression and anti-colonial resistance. The honour of a state funeral conferred on the late Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako clearly was meant to assuage feelings that had been hurt before – and Riruako had been on the forefront of the protests against the exclusion of the affected communities.

In sum, there remains an array of unresolved issues between Namibia and Germany concerning the colonial past. The overall picture regarding human remains is still unclear, and the holdings by museums, including outright war booty, still remain in Germany. Over and above this, the main issue, the question of a formal German apology, is still pending.

These issues are quite out of proportion in comparison to the modest steps towards token reparation made so far. Even these steps have been made possible by the pressure which after 2004 was brought to bear on various German institutions. The turn of the ruling party and Namibian Government in 2006 to pressurise for a German apology and adequate reparations, provided a great boost. However, alliance building within civil society and above all among affected communities was just as important. It is hard to imagine that the years ahead will be successful should the confrontational mode prevail that developed inside Namibia in early 2014.

The issues are not easy to resolve since they involve recognition of specific sacrifices and contributions by certain groups during anti-colonial resistance, as well as the image of Namibian history throughout the century of colonial rule. One may wonder how in this respect, the watch phrase or motto ‘unity in diversity’ will eventually play out. An inclusive but not uniform approach could benefit from the richness of oral tradition and performance that has been preserved and developed further in the commemorations. Over decades these commemorations have kept their ancestors’ exploits, sacrifices and sufferings vivid in the minds particularly of Ovaherero and Nama (see ch. 8).

The issue of human remains, which has occupied a central position within Namibian memory politics since 2007, reveals some dimensions that clearly go beyond even the genocide. The second repatriation should remind all those concerned that the collecting mania of race scientists and anthropologists during the 19th and early 20th Centuries was in swing before and continued unabated after the Namibian War. The issues raised by these human remains, then, also reach further to the severance of the dead from their communities, the dismemberment of bodies and the denial of a decent and customary burial. For the most part, there will be no way to rectify the cases of those persons whose remains have been repatriated from Germany.

In Namibia, such concerns had been repressed and dormant during the long period of colonialism. The issues came into the open only after independence, and they have revealed a range of dimensions, which clearly are not equally palatable to all.

The ceremonious repatriation in June 2014 of the remains of freedom fighters who had died during the liberation war and were buried in other parts of Africa eased long-standing sorrow and disquiet among relatives. Yet other, much more problematic and controversial dimensions emerge when considering the problems and the fates connected with human remains, their repatriation and reburial. Over the first decade of the new millennium, a

number of unexplained mass graves surfaced in various regions and were related to various periods, mostly the Namibian War and the liberation war. These finds have provoked further debates about the past, including ways to deal with the remains that have re-emerged, but also with the circumstances in which these people met their deaths. In particular, in connection with the last stages of the liberation war and the carnage connected with April 1, 1989, questions have been raised once again which point towards a persistent need for clarity. Similar frustrated quests for truth still pertain to the unaccounted victims of the 'spy drama' and the dungeons near Lubango where SWAPO dissidents were held in the 1980s under conditions that amounted to gross human rights violations. I was deeply moved to hear quite a few of my interlocutors connecting the remains of genocide victims with the remains of SWAPO members accused of being spies and found in unexplained mass graves near Lubango. The chief connection refers to bodies buried in unmarked graves far away from their homes.⁵

If a stand in the negotiation of the past with Germany is to be made, the unity that is needed may be more solid and reliable on the basis of an equitable resolution of other such festering consequences of large scale violence and gross human rights violations. These problems are compounded by the situation where a clear line between perpetrators and victims that is apparent in the colonial situation and in the confrontation of anti-colonial resistance is no longer present, and victims can also be perpetrators in other, related contexts. A turn to openness and clarity in these painful issues would involve a departure from the approach on SWAPO's part that so far has largely evaded unwelcome questions. Those who pose such questions have only limited potential to bring pressure to bear.

Self-righteous denial will never heal wounds, while remorse can do so in a way which adds legitimacy to authority. Finally, such considerations must not distract us from the unresolved issues of the colonial past. Rather, the potential connections just intimated may point to exigencies which the engagement with this past can evoke. In the last analysis, however, the postcolonial and transnational process of coming to terms with the heritage of colonial genocide will be predicated on political will on both sides.

As these concluding remarks emphasise, German officialdom has been less than forthcoming overall, given the perpetrator position in which it inevitably finds itself. It is hard to evade the conclusion that this attitude and stance are the outflow of a power position which does not derive directly from the colonial relationship, but in the way it is executed and maintained is set to reproduce such a relationship. In this way, and across undeniable differences, the official German approach resonates with the denialist camp, both amongst German speaking Namibians and in Germany. The exponents of the denialist camp raise their voices, even though to a narrowly circumscribed public, at almost every turn of the memory politics addressed in this book (see especially ch. 5). The implications should serve as a stern reminder to German policy makers to seriously review their outlook on an issue that in the long run can only taint Germany's image in Africa.

5 On the spy drama, see Hunter 2008b, 2010; for more on the connection mentioned, Kössler 2011b, 2014b.

Obviously, matters of state are pursued by the respective governments according to their own logic and definition of interests. Therefore, much remains to be done for concerned citizens on both sides. Even though there seems to be a considerable difference between Namibians who rely on traditional authorities (and in important ways act on their behalf) and Germans who have formed small groups around postcolonial agendas, experience has shown that such apparently diverse initiatives have more in common than may be suspected at first sight. Over their irrefutable diversity, these individuals and groups have shown that they can link up and align themselves to work for a future relationship between the two countries and peoples. Such a relationship does not deny the colonial heritage, but works to overcome it by recognising responsibility and by talking and acting on an equal footing for a common purpose. It may well be that the obstacles and difficulties encountered on this admittedly difficult road will in the end nurture nascent commonalities. In this way, we cannot expect that the wounds and traumas of the past will be done away with, but we can hope both sides will learn to live with this heritage in mutual respect.

Finally, such processes are embedded in the overall situation. Namibia cannot avoid addressing the fundamental problems of gross social inequality and the land question. While inequality now is rooted in more complex conditions than the colonial impact alone, the expropriation of land on a huge scale after the Namibian War remains an enduring fact that continues to shape people's everyday lives and carries immense symbolic meaning.

Redress for the blatant wrongs of genocide and land expropriation therefore remains a pressing issue, and it needs to be placed high on the agenda of reaching a mutual understanding based on genuine trust and respect. As shown by the German debate on such redress after World War II, couched in the term *Wiedergutmachung* (setting right again), after such cataclysmic events as those that have formed the backdrop for the discussion in this book, things in fact can never be set quite 'right' again. However, genuine remorse and a readiness to listen, and then take the necessary and quite obvious steps, is an avenue of action that is open to the generations living today, and indeed required of them.

For many years, concerned Namibians have articulated a wish for just that – 'structured dialogue'. Such dialogue can become a reality even in small ways, even though genuine closure will require a pronouncement and appropriate action by the representatives of the German State. To work towards such a goal will be difficult, given the political power relations that prevail today. Still, if Namibian activists commit themselves, as they do, to struggles that might extend beyond their lifetimes, concerned German citizens must not hesitate to follow their lead.

Official German policy would do well to heed the advice of former Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (2014: 58). In reflecting on the resolution of the Namibian independence conflict and his own role in this process, Genscher stated conditions for conflict resolution. These conditions include, besides the principle of peaceful means, taking your partners seriously and trying to understand their motivations; not being selective in espousing and enforcing lofty principles such as human rights (or, one may add, recognition of past wrong and consequent responsibilities); and not pursuing politics of interest and influence.

In August 2014, 70 years after SS troops massacred hundreds of Italian civilians in the small village of Sant'Anna di Stazzema, a German court finally opened legal proceedings against one of the last surviving perpetrators. He had been sentenced in Italy years before, but Germany had refused to extradite him. Two Italian eye witnesses who had survived as small boys and had later campaigned against oblivion and impunity, stressed how important it was to prosecute these crimes even after such a long time and even though the culprit, an octogenarian, would surely not serve a jail sentence.

What is important to the survivors in this example is recognition of injustice. Moreover, they are sure the Germans will also benefit from the trial which would help to immunise youth against fanaticism (SZ 12.8.2014). Such sentiments dovetail almost seamlessly with what one can hear in Namibia, if one is prepared to listen. In this way, this recent instance underscores two central conclusions. For (not only) Germans and the German State, coming to terms with a dire past remains an open and on-going process, and moreover, truth telling and formal recognition of past wrongs and atrocities lies at the heart of any serious reconciliation.

The road towards universal and effective acceptance of these principles is rough and difficult to negotiate at best, and will need determined citizens in Namibia as well as in Germany to make any headway. They will need to confront those who rely on the might or the ostensible reasons of state. This book suggests that the issues of reconciliation and repairing the consequences of state sponsored atrocities do not lend themselves readily to state action. Where the state displays in-built inability to act in the right way, it is all the more incumbent on citizens on both sides to raise their voices and, limited as their means may be, take action.

As this book goes to press, the German Foreign Office has disclosed that on June 2, 2014, the Namibian and the German Foreign Ministers had 'begun a process of dialogue'. This dialogue concerns in particular the 'search for a common position and a common language with respect to the brutal colonial war of the years 1904 to 1908'. As stated, the dialogue had made progress but was not yet concluded. This statement is contained in an answer to a series of questions put to the ministry by members of the Green parliamentary party.⁶ The answer states clearly that the Foreign Office sees 'no basis in international law for Namibian demands for reparations directed towards the Federal Republic of Germany', and it does not address dialogue or negotiations with affected communities. In this way, the trajectory of a struggle for small steps forward will need to be pursued further, even should 2015 mark the advent of one such important small step. The same applies to yet a further appeal by representatives of civil society, arts and culture, academia and the churches, handed over to President Gauck on occasion of the centenary of the ending of German colonial rule in Namibia with the capitulation of the Schutztruppe on July 9, 1915.

6 Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Ulle Schauws, Özcan Mutlu, Claudia Roth (Augsburg), Dr. Frithjof Schmidt, Uwe Kekeritz, Tabea Rößner, Annalena Baerbock, Marieluise Beck (Bremen), Agnieszka Brugger, Tom Koenigs, Dr. Tobias Lindner, Omid Nouripour, Cem Özdemir, Manuel Sarrazin, Jürgen Trittin, Doris Wagner, Katja Dörner, Karl Gehring, Elisabeth Scharfenberg, Beate Walter-Rosenheimer und der Fraktion Bündnis 90/Die Grünen – Bundestagsdrucksache: Nr. 18-4903 vom 06.05.2015 – Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte in Namibia.

Glossary

Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kriegsgräberfürsorge: ‘action group for the care of war graves’, organisation among German speakers in Namibia.

Bambusen: Ovaherero boys and young men recruited for personal service to German military.

Big Five: a conventional term which refers to elephant, rhino, Cape buffalo, lion and leopard as the top five tourist attractions for game viewing (and hunting).

Bundestag: German Federal Parliament.

Charité: University Hospital in Berlin.

Deutscher Kulturrat: German Cultural Council; umbrella NGO of German speakers in Namibia.

Deutsch-Namibische Gesellschaft (German–Namibian Association): Society for the promotion of German–Namibian relations and friendship. Includes the promotion of tourism and is associated with a publishing house dedicated to Namibian topics.

deutschnational: radical nationalist orientation in Germany with strong ethnicist (*völkisch*) orientation; in the Weimar Republic, the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (German National People’s Party) represented radical nationalism and formed a coalition that brought the Nazi party to power in 1933.

Dienstbuch: similar to later reference books under South African rule; record of service introduced under the German Native Ordinances.

Freikorps: freelance militias formed after the end of World War I; active in border conflicts mainly with Poland and in quelling the revolutionary movement on the Left. Instrumental in the attempted coup d’état in 1920, and subsequently in putting down the workers whose general strike had prevented the putsch from succeeding.

Gaob: Nama term for supreme traditional leader, widely rendered as Kaptein (Afrikaans), more recently also as King.

German Empire: From 1871, the German state founded in this year bore the official name of Empire (*Reich*). This symbolically burdened term harks back to the Middle Ages and was retained after the Emperor (*Kaiser*) had been removed by the 1918 revolution. Only from 1949 onward, the Federal Republic and the Democratic Republic no longer made reference to this (by then) thoroughly discredited concoction of political programme and imagination.

Gleichschaltung: Absorption of civil society organisations into the front organisations of the Nazi party after 1933.

Grosser Generalstab: Great General Staff, military directing and planning body uniting the Prussian General Staff with officers from Bavaria, Württemberg and Saxony.

Greens: Political party in Germany, organised on the basis of new social movements, entered the *Bundestag* in 1982, re-formed after unification to take in part of the East German citizens' rights movements, since then officially, *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*.

Grundgesetz: literally, basic law; the German Constitution, in force in West Germany since 1949 and extended to the former GDR in 1990.

Heroes Day: I. National holiday in Namibia, commemorating the commencement of the liberation war in 1966. II. Commemoration in Gibeon, renamed in 1980 from *Witbooi fees* or *Kapteins fees* to underline the focus on national liberation.

Kaptein: see *Gaob*.

Kommando: with reference to the Cape frontier, denotes an armed group under a leader; currently, refers to the meeting place, often a building, of Herero *oturupa*.

Länder (sing. Land): 16 individual states, making up the Federal Republic of Germany; vested in particular with the right to determine all matters of cultural policy.

Landnahme: almost obsolete German term for occupying land in foreign places; in current parlance, appropriately rendered as 'land grabbing'.

okuruwo: Holy Fire (Otjiherero).

ombara: Otjiherero term for supreme chief.

omuhona (pl. ovahona): Otjiherero term for chief.

omazemburukiro: Herero annual commemoration.

oturupa: Herero social and cultural organisation, most conspicuous by their uniforms and marching practices; also referred to as *otjiserandu*, *Truppienspieler*. Reflecting the divisions of Ovaherero into the Red, White and Green (Mbanderu) Band, they are composed of *otjiserandu*, *otjiapa* und *otjingirine*.

ohoze: group of activists around Chief Hosea Kutako during the 1950s.

Ozombu zOvindimba: Place of the proclamation by General Lothar von Trotha on October 2, 1904, calling for the annihilation of Ovaherero.

re-education: refers to efforts by the (western) Allies in post-World War II to expunge Nazism from the public mind in Germany; for some time mostly used in polemical contexts to stigmatise open dealing with Nazi crimes.

Schutzgebiet: literally, Protectorate; official term for the colonies Germany had acquired.

Schutztruppe: literally, protection force; designation of German colonial troops.

Südwest: lit., 'Southwesters', traditional self-reference of German speakers in Namibia, alluding to the colonial name of South West Africa/*Südwestafrika*.

Vergangenheitspolitik: lit., politics referring to the past; coined by German historian Norbert Frei, this denotes a political strategy prevalent in the 1950s in West Germany and aimed at forestalling active engagement with Nazi crimes and commitment to deal with the perpetrators. In fact, by this strategy, perpetrators were shielded from prosecution or released from prison long before their sentences had expired.

völkisch: refers to *Volk* (people), denotes extreme chauvinist tendencies in Germany that claim to base themselves on the ethnic commonalities and heritage of Germans; closely linked to racist ideas.

Wiedergutmachung: lit., setting right again; (West) German official practice for dealing with the consequences of Nazi crimes.

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Notes:

Archival sources are given in the footnotes.

With a few considered exceptions, publications are cited by their dates of first appearance. Where later editions have been used, this is noted in the bibliography by giving these publication dates in square brackets.

Where an entry is a chapter in a book listed with full details elsewhere in the bibliography, only the name of the editor is given.

In representing German terms, names and book titles, the 'ß' is rendered as 'ss', while all the 'Umlauts' have been retained. A vowel with Umlaut is alphabetized as having a following 'e'. German spelling always follows the originals (through two major orthography reforms). The common German nobility title of 'von' is not considered as part of the surname in the sense that it determines alphabetical order. Accordingly, authors writing in German and/or residing in Germany appear in alphabetical order under their main name and in the body text; the 'von' has generally been dropped and only the surname appears. In the case of other authors, general English usage has been followed. For materials from the internet or also available on the internet, last access dates are given.

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ABOUT THE COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Nicola Brandt's cover photograph, *Spectre*, formed part of her exhibition *The Earth Inside*, at the National Art Gallery of Namibia in 2014.

Nicola is one of the younger generation of Namibian Germans who feel the obligation to remember and engage with their past. Another young Namibian German, Steffen List (the cover designer) describes his own perceptions on what it could mean to 'put on the dress':

It is about accepting confrontation – to wear another's 'clothes' is to step outside our impression of ourselves, beyond our history, culture, tradition, the norms of our time, beyond even our guilt. It is not about leaving these behind, but about widening their scope to experience a truer definition of ourselves and others and how close we are in fact connected to each other. As I put on the Herero dress voluntarily, judgement – if any – can only be my own – and is often a prerequisite to experiencing the meaning, impact and attainment of change. As such self-judgement is an encouragement to give deeper consideration to (what it may feel like to be dressed in) the wound my ancestors have caused in a people's history.

The cover speaks on many levels: it becomes a symbol of beauty and hope coming out of a dark place.

100 years since the end of German colonial rule in Namibia, the relationship between the former colonial power and the Namibian communities who were affected by its brutal colonial policies remains problematic, and interpretations of the past are still contested.

This book examines the ongoing debates, conflicts and confrontations over the past. It scrutinises the consequences of German colonial rule, its impact on the descendants of victims of the 1904–08 genocide, Germany's historical responsibility, and ways in which post-colonial reconciliation might be achieved.

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